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A Retrospect on the Curriculum Development Process of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna

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Abstract

This paper describes the process of the curriculum revision process for 13 degree programmes offered by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science of the University of Ruhuna. Firstly, it justifies the background and rationale for embarking on an inclusive approach to revise the existing curricula. The challenging factors identified during the curriculum development process were analysed to come up with a comprehensive mechanism for a qualitative transformation in higher education in Humanities and Social Sciences. Secondly, it discusses the steps taken and strategies applied from the beginning to the final output in order to ensure that the expected objectives are achieved.

Keywords: Curriculum Development, Curriculum Development Committee, Humanities and Social Sciences, Employability, Graduate Attributes

Introduction

This paper intends to describe the experience of the curriculum revision process undertaken from 2018 to 2020 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna. Further, it sheds light on how the curriculum in Humanities and Social Sciences could be revised addressing the market needs while not compromising the core of the discipline and, as such, enlightens the "marketability" of the discipline of Humanities and Social Sciences, setting against the dominant attitudes towards the discipline in the society.

Background and Rationale

An effective curriculum should reflect the rationale and philosophy-based goals and objectives (Hussain et al., 2011; Redon & Angulo 2015; Alsubaie, 2016). The curriculum development has two broader connotations as pointed out by Angulo (1994) and Soto (2015). Firstly, it is a process of moulding learners with essential skills and talents through shaping and reshaping the contents and the process of instructions in the educational environment based on the experiences accrued by working with the existing curricula. The other connotation emphasises that as a response or reaction to several

exogenous encounters coming as policy recommendations or directives or motivational threads of consultations or training experience.

This comprehensive analysis provides an ample pathway to comment on the need for curriculum revision in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna. Two clusters of factors enforced a syllabus revision in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. Firstly, the external factor: the unemployability of graduates in Humanities and Social Sciences, which has long been raised in different platforms by different parties. The research emphasised that these graduates lack the skills and the attitudes required for the present-day world of work (Ariyawansa, 2008; The World Bank, 2009; Gunathilake *et al.*, 2010; National Audit Office, 2019). As a result, many parties emphasised that the traditional curricula, which focused more on subject knowledge, needed to be revised, enabling the graduates in Humanities and Social Sciences to succeed in the present-day job market (Bridgstock, 2009; University Grants Commission, 2015). The higher education authorities took the policy decisions and accordingly provided guidelines and directives that led to a drastic change in Humanities and Social Sciences education in Sri Lanka. However, some scholars have vehemently argued against the marketisation of humanities and social sciences, emphasising that it would damage the discipline's core (Delucchi, 1997; Costa, 2019).

Secondly, the internal factor: the faculty had recognised the need for a curriculum revision based on its own experience and findings. The existing curricula developed in 2014, were not updated to incorporate the advancements in the disciplines. The faculty at that time had only two-degree programmes *i.e.* BA (General) and BA (Special) programmes. Programme Reviews were done on these two programmes in 2017, and they got B (60%) and B (68.65%) grades, respectively (Faculty Program Review Report on BA Special and General, 2017). However, the reviewers had made some important recommendations for further improvements in the programmes. While taking necessary steps to implement reviewers' recommendations, the faculty started a timely discussion on the need for a complete revision of the curricula.

Furthermore, the tracer studies on employment of most recent graduates, conducted annually by the university, were another alarming factor that forced the faculty to rush towards a complete revision of the existing curricula. The studies presented a declining employment rate of the graduates produced by the faculty. Under the influence of these two factors, the faculty started the revision of the existing curricula in 2018. We took both these views into account in the process of revision of the syllabi. Our main objective was to produce graduates for market needs without compromising the philosophical core of the subject disciplines.

Process of Curriculum Development

The process started with appointing a faculty sub-committee which was later upgraded to the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC). After reviewing relevant literature and a series of discussions with stakeholders, the curriculum development committee first formulated a philosophy for the task of curriculum revision. As such, the faculty had a philosophical background for revising the curricula: adhering to all the guidelines and directives, addressing the issue of unemployability and under employability of arts graduates, but not compromising the core of the discipline, the faculty would revise its syllabi with the aim of producing graduates who would succeed in the current job market not by merely transforming into "operators", but by adding values to the world of work with the core of the humanities and social sciences with which they are deeply enriched.

In other words, the philosophy of the curriculum revision of the faculty was not just to add some "needs" of the market highlighted by the surveys. On the contrary, while addressing those issues and adhering to the guidelines and directives, the faculty also wanted to find out and bring forward what humanities and social sciences demand in the present job market. Furthermore, it also committed not to compromise the core of the discipline, the spirit that only the humanities and social sciences engulf, which is essentially needed for the well-being of the society and required immensely for a just society—the core of human civilization valued beyond the immediate market value.

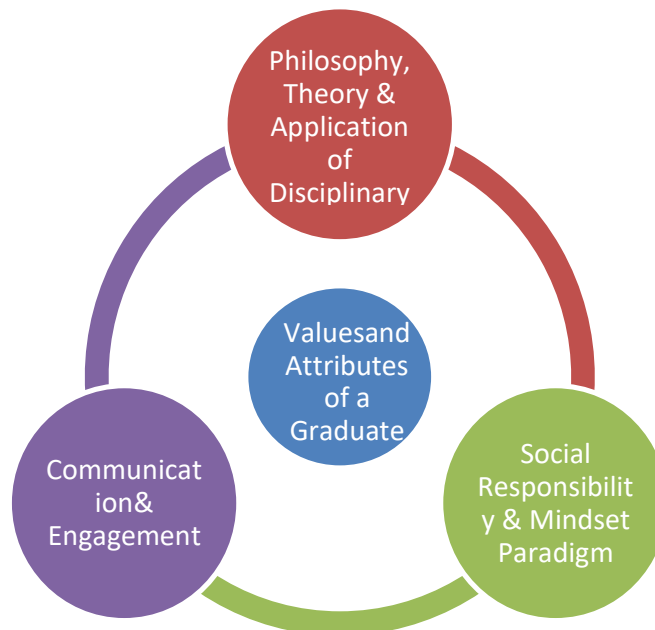


Figure 1: Values and attributes of graduates

After sharing this philosophical standpoint with the academic staff of the faculty, the curriculum development committee developed a model of proportion for curriculum development based on the

guidelines and directives. The model proposed to allocate 60% for the major subject of each degree programme and 40% for the subjects demanded by the job market. The 40% allocated for subjects in demand by the job market was subdivided as 27% for communication and engagement and 13% for social responsibility and mindset paradigm. Parallely, the curriculum development committee developed a model module and conducted a series of workshops to share ideas and get feedback from the faculty's academic staff. As a result, a format for module development was finalised. The departments were directed to develop the modules for 60% components while the Department of English Language Teaching, IT unit, and other identified experts were directed to develop the modules for 40% components as common modules. The objective was to ensure that all the graduates are competent in the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mindset paradigm required by the current job market, irrespective of the major discipline of the degree programme they follow.

Table 1: Structure of the degree program

Philosophy, Theory & Application of Disciplinary Knowledge (60%)	Communication & Engagement (27%)	Social Responsibility & Mindset Paradigm (13%)
1. Foundation and Philosophical basis of the subject 2. Concepts, theories, methodologies, and multifaceted aspects of the discipline 3. Research, Application and Synthesizing	1. Language Proficiency 2. Public Speaking 3. Basic Computer Application 4. Mathematical, Numerical Skills & Logical Reasoning 5. Soft Skills and Personality Development	1. Ethics, Values & Vision of Life 2. Critical & Creative Thinking 3. Cross-disciplinary Knowledge (Humanities/Social Sciences)

Modules developed for this purpose were namely: Elements of English Grammar, Introduction to Information and Communication Technology, Ethics, Values, and Vision of Life, English Reading Skills, Essential Skills in Digital Presentation, Sinhala Writing Skills, Mathematical and Numerical Skills, Speaking and Writing Skills in Tamil, Information Literacy and Scientific Communication Skills, Socio-emotional Skills, Philosophy of Knowledge and Research, Academic Writing Skills in English, Human Resource Management, Business English, Public Speaking in English, Soft Skills and Personality Development, and Critical and Creative Thinking. After completing a four-year degree programme, a graduate earns 58 total credits from these modules. For the three-year degree programme, it stands as 36 total credits.

The respective departments started revising syllabi and developing degree programmes. Each department followed a shared schedule in the process of revision of curricula. The departments first identified the areas of importance in their respective disciplines according to the Subject Benchmark Statements and stakeholder surveys. Based on them, 60% of the components of each degree programme was subdivided, and modules to be developed were identified. The list of modules was sent to experts to ensure that the components comprise the core of each discipline. After that, modules were developed in a series of department-level workshops. Each module was under the scrutiny of an expert in the relevant subject area. The finalised modules were sent to external experts for refinements. As a result, the faculty completed 13 degree programmes with revised curricula, out of which 12 were four-year degree programmes and 1 was a three-year degree programme. In parallel, the by-law committee of the faculty developed a new by-law enabling the implementation of the new degree programmes. The complete revised curricula of all 13 degree programmes were submitted to external reviewers through the CQA of the University of Ruhuna. After receiving reviewers' comments, the curricula of all degree programmes were revised, incorporating suggestions and taking into consideration the comments. After completion of curricula revision, a curriculum mapping was done for each degree programme and graduate profiles were derived accordingly. Finally, the curricula of all degree programmes were submitted for the senate's approval, with detailed reports prepared addressing the reviewers' comments. In 2020, by revising the new by-laws, the faculty achieved one of the targets of the strategic plan of the university: converting all degree programmes to four-year degree programmes.

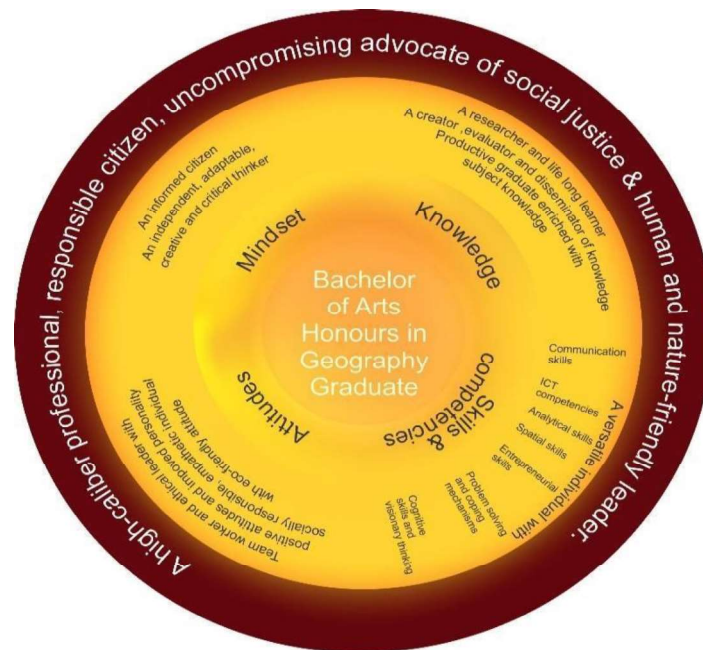


Figure 2: Sample Graduate profile

Conclusions

Humanities and social sciences have long been the major provider that ensured the expanding the opportunities for higher education for the citizens of the country. As such, they have contributed a lot to create educated citizenship and facilitate upward social mobility. Furthermore, the humanities and social sciences secure the norms of an ethically healthy society, laying down the foundation for a democratic and just society. However, the humanities and social sciences disciplines have been challenged on the grounds of the unemployability of their graduates. Curriculum is the core of education and revising humanities and social sciences curricula addressing the needs of the world of work while not loosening their essence is a challenging task. The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Ruhuna revised its curricula based on a solid philosophical background, adhering to guidelines and directives of higher education, and addressing the needs of the world of work. The faculty now offers 13 degree programmes with revised curricula and is dedicated to producing "a high-calibre professional, responsible citizen, uncompromising advocate of social justice, and humane and nature-friendly leader."

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