

AN EVALUATION OF THE SEMESTER SYSTEM INTRODUCED BY THE FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA

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This study was carried out with a sample of 300 undergraduates in the academic year 2003/2004 to investigate the attitudes of the undergraduates regarding the curricula, teaching methodology and the evaluation procedures carried out under the semester system of the Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya introduced in 2000/2001.

The responses to the questionnaire distributed among students revealed some important concerns and lapses in the semester system. Significant responses of the students are as follows: Aspirations of students are not considered before deciding the subjects they should study. Their subjects are mostly academic and have limited relevance to future career needs. The students do not have adequate facilities for gaining computer skills. Facilities for communicating in English are not sufficient in the English classes. The students seldom get opportunities for stimulating their knowledge by asking questions at the end of lectures. Opportunities for enhancing skills by community work are limited. No arrangements are made by the Faculty to gain experience in the professional sector. Large number of assignments given to students within a limited period cannot be completed satisfactorily. Time given to prepare for mid-semester examinations is not sufficient.

The suggestions of students were further clarified by interviewing a sample of lecturers. 90% of the sample accepted the views expressed by the students. They agreed that the suggestions of the students were reasonable and could be implemented by modifying the existing procedures.

Some of the significant suggestions of the academic staff for overcoming the deficiencies of the semester system are as follows: (1) Each department should provide a semester schedule and a handbook containing the syllabi of undergraduate courses. (2) A series of workshops on teaching methodology for the academic staff will improve the quality of teaching. (3) Distributing handouts at the beginning of the lecture containing a summary of the subject matter including references is desirable. (4) As an alternative to reduce the number of assignments, it is desirable to introduce a framework by each department for presenting assignments in summary form. (5) It is desirable to distribute marked assignments among students to enable the students to identify their lapses. (6) Providing mid-semester examination schedules in advance facilitates the students to prepare for examinations. (7) Allocation of separate index numbers for mid-semester and final examinations eliminates undue suspicion of students regarding favoritism. With the assistance and co-operation of the members of the academic staff and the students suitable remedial measures for improving the existing semester system may be introduced.