

'Study in India' Website at INFLIBNET using BasisPlus / TechlibPlus and Basis Web Server : A proposal

R. RAMAN NAIR

Kerala Agricultural University, Vellanikkara, Thrissur - 680 654

Abstract

An information system on academic programmes offered by various higher educational institutions in India can help the students to select apt courses and field of study and institution and enable universities and institutes to assess the need for the introduction of a specific programme in a particular locality. The author suggests that the INFLIBNET should develop such a system with a website as '*Study in India*' and defines its objectives. Existing information sources like *World of Learning* and *Universities Hardlook* would not be able to serve the purpose. Therefore computerised databases can be developed by INFLIBNET (with a website named *Study in India*) with the help of packages like BASIS PLUS / TECHLIB Plus and BASIS web server. Ofcourse CDS / ISIS software package can also be used by the libraries for this purpose. The author suggests for the development of a computerised prospectus as a standard format for all the universities and colleges in India.

Introduction

There is a necessity for the development of an information system on academic programmes offered by various higher educational institutions in India. Databases of academic programmes should be developed at institutional, regional and national level. They should be accessible online to the public and also to the educational institutions through existing information networks. Such databases can help the students to select apt courses and field of study and institution and enable universities and institutes to assess the need for the introduction of a specific programme in a particular locality. It can also help universities to comparatively evaluate their curriculum and programmes with similar ones of other universities and effect improvements.

'Study in India' Website

Information on academic programmes offered by Indian institutions of higher education is vast and varied and it remains without timely coordination for use. But authentic speedy accurate information on

academic programmes is inevitable for the public and also the decision makers in educational administration. Hence the information on academic programmes offered during an academic year should be collected and made available at a central place in India from the beginning of the academic year. INFLIBNET which is maintaining computerised database for the use of the universities and colleges can establish a Centre for Admission/Prospectus Information named 'Study in India' with the following objectives:

- to build up a repository and information dissemination centre on academic programmes of Indian as well as foreign universities;
- to collect, store, process, organise, retrieve and disseminate information on academic programmes offered at various institutions of higher education in India;
- to gear up modern technologies of information handling for academic programmes information and to computerise the storage of information for accurate and speedy retrieval;
- to give publicity to various academic programmes offered by our higher education institutions;
- to facilitate scientific communication through new techniques like E-Mail, Web Page, Bulletin Boards etc.;
- to make available through online the information to public and to institutions if necessary at a nominal cost;
- to standardise databases, to plan guide and implement establishment of academic information systems at university and regional level and standardise database formats and services;
- to evolve and implement standard for preparation of prospectuses, handbooks and yearbooks of universities and colleges; and
- to publish in electronic or printed media yearbooks, handbooks and databases on academic programmes offered in India.

Existing Information Sources

In most of the countries various publications disseminate information about educational opportunities. Most of them are annuals and are published as education yearbooks, handbooks etc. From UK and USA various periodicals like Study in UK, etc are published giving information about courses, prospectus etc. At present there is no authentic periodical or online database service on academic programmes in India.

World of Learning

World of Learning prepared by Commonwealth of Learning, Netherlands and published by Europa Publications annually is one of the few authentic information sources on higher education institutions worldwide. It gives a list of worldwide academic mailing list, names over 1,50,000 academic staff and officials, includes every year the new appointments and change of addresses, and gives details of over 400 international organizations concerned with higher education. But, even then the publication reaches institutions in the middle of the concerned year. Information given is not uptodate to enable a student to seek admission immediately.

Universities Handbook

Universities Handbook published by Association of Indian Universities is a database giving details of academic programmes offered by institutions of higher education in India. It contains information about 300 universities, deemed universities and institutions of national importance. The details provided cover; officers and deans of faculties, library and research facilities, scholarships and fellowships, courses of studies, names of professors, names of colleges and other details. But it is published every alternate year and is not intended for providing prospectus information in time and so cannot be used as a reference source for immediate actual requirements of students who seek admission every year.

Computerised Databases

INFLIBNET can produce various databases that can provide to the students in India and abroad information on our academic programmes, syllabi, research guides, universities and colleges and facilities offered by them and maintain a Website name Study in India. INFLIBNET has already started work on this line. But a database that can allow students who seek admission in various Indian universities; from inside the country and abroad, which will be available online through Internet is not seen in the immediate plans of INFLIBNET. It should prescribe some standards for the development of databases giving prospectus information. The databases can be developed at university level and merged with the National Database held at INFLIBNET. The colleges and universities can prepare their annual prospectus for admission according to the standards prescribed and the same can be pooled together and maintained in the university of regional level databases and also transferred

electronically to INFLIBNET. This will enable INFLIBNET to provide information on a programme conducted anywhere in India even before the announcement of admission to the programme in the regional press.

BASISPlus / TECHLIBPlus

The major limitation of INFLIBNET is the lack of an internationally accepted standard package that offers all possibilities for such a Website. It should be very userfriendly for access as well as compatible with all search packages through which the site is to be accessed. The package presently INFLIBNET is using is developed with its support and is only in a testing stage. So parallel to this INFLIBNET should use an internationally accepted package till its package could achieve that standard and things can be converted to that. Otherwise many projects will be delayed and the objectives of INFLIBNET will be defeated.

One of the important package available in India and accepted the world over is BASISPlus/TECHLIBPlus. It can be used for immediately creating and maintaining a Study in India Website, if required additional modules are also added. It is developed by Information Dimensions, USA, tested and further developed by its use at various universities in USA and UK, and is customised for Indian situations by National Informatics Centre (NIC), Government of India. As Government has subsidised its cost in arrangement with its original developers it is cost effective. It is distributed in India by NIC.

Power of BASISPlus

BASISPlus is a Relational Database Management System (RDBMS) which combines many features normally not available together in any other similar packages. It combines the following three key technologies in a single platform

- Full text retrieval
- Relational database management system
- Object management

Information Dimensions have also developed application packages TECHLIBPlus and BASIS Webserver which can be overlayed in BASISPlus. These together can meet all the requirement of INFLIBNET including maintaining of required websites like Study in India.

BASIS Web Server

BASISPlus has a Webserver module named BASIS Web libraries externalise BASISplus database functionality on to the World Wide Web (WWW) through any World Wide Web Server (httpd server). The following implementation options are available.

- Information Dimensions tight integration provides BASIS Webserver v1.0: CERN or BASIS Web Server v2.0: Netsite communication and commerce servers from Netscape communications using NSAPI.
- Common Gateway Interface module links BASIS Web libraries with any Web Server.

University/College Prospectus Automation

The most important requirement for launching a Study in India Website is the preparation of computerised prospectus for admission by all colleges and universities and transmission to INFLIBNET without any delay. In this context we have to remember one thing. 90% of the colleges and about 50% of the universities remain without automating their libraries or any of their office such procedures. So minimum one trained librarian with UGC qualifications should be made compulsory at all universities and colleges to which UGC provides support. The duty of automating prospectus should be assigned to such a librarian and it should be made compulsory. Without such measures nothing will happen.

CDS / ISIS

CDS/ISIS is a menu-driven information storage and retrieval system designed specifically for the computerised management of structured non-numerical databases. Although it deals with text and words, and offers therefore many of the features normally found in word processing packages, it does more than just text processing. This is because the text that this programme processes is structured into data elements that one defines. The software is available in most of the libraries of universities in India which are automated and so it will be very easy to use this programme immediately for creation of automated prospectuses in colleges and universities.

For maintaining a Study in India Website it will be essential for INFLIBNET to create and maintain various databases like those on courses, teachers, and research guides, colleges etc. For this BASISPlus/TECHLIBPlus is an apt package. Estimated records for course combination is eighty thousand to one lakh.

Computerised Prospectus

A sample automated prospectus has been prepared by Professor R. Raman Nair and Dr. U. Mohammed Kunju of Kerala Agricultural University for demonstration of a sample Study in India Database at the Vice Chancellors Conference held at Rabindra Bharati university, Calcutta during 1996. It is based on the prospectus for PG and UG courses of Kerala Agricultural University. The field coverage is incomplete. But while INFLIBNET develop such a database it should evaluate the prospectuses of all the universities and the colleges existing in India to finalise the required fields. Common Communication Format (CCF) developed by Unesco should be followed to enable standardisation and exchange of information with other similar centres that may come into existence in other parts of the world and enable the development of such academic programmes database at international level.

Conclusion

The Study in India Website should allow end user to search through the database by the name of a course, subject of specialization, name of institution, the location in which the institutions is situated, the scientist or teacher who is offering lectures or guidance in a particular specialization and also through many other search points. It should display the search results on the screen. If the number of records are more than one it should allow the user to scan the next record and previous record. It should allow the user to do the search through graphical interfaces or to write full statement for the search or part statement with the right truncation. Everything should be userfriendly and attractive.

Creating and maintaining a Study in India Website at national level means being able to develop standards for prospectuses, collect together related items of information from the prospectuses of institutions nationwide and deliver it in a computer readable form and providing access to the information to the public. The production of electronic database prospectuses can enable the student community all over the country irrespective of location and distance to have access to information about the courses of their interest. This can allow healthy competition for education, students to select apt courses and help institutions to get the best candidates for their specialised programmes. The resources utilised for higher education thus can reap maximum returns.

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