

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Inclusive Education, the myth
- University of Reddit

Inclusive Education, the myth 1

University of Reddit 3

*"You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere.."*

—Lee Iacocca

## Inclusive Education, the myth

There is a lot of hype about inclusive education. Education in its lexicon automatically appropriates inclusion. In other words, at least as per Indian laws everyone has a Right to Education. The polemics of the word "inclusive" coupled with its interpretive nature is precisely because of non-inclusion, because of non-affordability and things like capitation fees which has earned several times the stricture of the Apex Court. Inclusive education also means opportunities, access to education, for those who live in seclusion and in disadvantaged social and economic conditions. However, the telling paradox is that education is becoming also more and more exclusive. Otherwise, how do we explain the ubiquitous cut off marks ranging from 97- 99 to get admission in colleges in the country, especially in the capital city where everyone tends to make a bee line for? Or with privatisation of education the money factor impounds on the quality, and this intersection makes it difficult to draw the distinction as to where the actual emphasis is on: money or the elusive 'quality.'

Apropos of the fact that education must be inherently flexible in terms of access is a point of ambiguity. It cannot because schools and colleges have limited openings or seats. And why is this so? Because they say the student teacher ration must be contained. This is true. But the ratio is still on the very high side especially in government schools. The major part of it is that education in our country is systemically flawed. The learning by rote, andragogy or pedagogy still continues unabashedly. Of course today we have the internet, but the 'cut' and 'paste' formula still works with élan both among students and teachers! Added to this is the ghost of teacher absenteeism.

If we look at the flexibility perspective of education, we are thinking of a complexity of factors: the continuity of it, alternating between work and study, lifelong education, education for women, working people, education for those challenged due to reasons beyond their control or their parents and continuing education- a steady flow of the precepts of learning from childhood to adulthood unimpeded by trauma of failing, getting degrees and an interested or even a 'disinterested' pursuit of learning for its own sake and for pleasure.

It is precisely here that Distance and Open learning can play a pivotal role in shaping education, giving it the much needed dynamism, flexibility and continuity in a steady and unabated flow. Moreover, it gives a chance to the learner to come back to the studies after a break for whatever reasons. It addresses the problem of 'drop outs' and one time failure by giving maximum time to complete courses and programmes. It introduces flexible concepts like associate degree and credit transfer thereby opening up dialogue with other universities for inter student mobility. It is no wonder then that Distance and Open education in India, free of myopic restrictions, has become very popular with its intake of students accounting for almost twenty five per cent of the takers in Higher Education. Moreover, it subverts a degree bias and places certification and diplomas on a common platform, not meant to be comparable with higher degrees, but standing on their own right as professional or vocational short term academic programmes.

The Distance Education Council in IGNOU till a few years back was a regulatory body to maintain standards in Distance Education. It was to Distance Education what UGC was and is to conventional education. So IGNOU served a dual mandate. It was both a university as well as an apex body for distance and open learning systems in India. That made its functions complex if not complicated, and since conflict of interests could develop DEC was merged with UGC. However UGC being a pivotal point for both Distance Education and conventional education, has made the matters obfuscated, as Distance Education with its huge target group of learners, with varied social and economic backgrounds may not get the focus it deserves.

In recent years the glitches and the stumbling blocks are many. The University Grants Commission which is now the apex body for assessing distance education insists on a review every two to three years. There are restrictions on introducing new courses and monitoring of dual body institutions saying that these universities cannot introduce courses in Distance Education other than what they offer in their respective institutions. This is not only duplication but a gross embargo on innovation. Moreover, again under its aegis the NCTE, AICTE, Nursing Council of India, the Dental Council are imposing all kinds of restrictions on Open Universities to initiate professional programmes by means of partnerships and alliances. The collaborative nuances of education are undermined and stifled. Access and flexibility are becoming myths and education in India is slowly going back to its days of backwardness - learning by rote and procuring degrees by the do or die maxim.

So in this context what is inclusiveness? It is the rounded appeal of education which is cardinal. Inclusion would mean accommodation of education for all, which is a catchword and still remains mythical. Inclusion will mean related entry norms, extension of the classroom in terms of pedagogy, introducing innovative standards like reflexive technology, internet, and free and open source software by means of which students can glean information for knowledge transference. Teachers

must use both in the synchronous and asynchronous modes; the mobile phone and the internet to keep in touch with students. E-learning must be appropriately used in terms of teaching; use of the Skype, Google/ Yahoo groups, and social networking sites will not only bring traditional effects to education, while reducing 'distances' and breaking barriers of isolation.

Moreover, if distance is a myth as Negroponte argues then very automatically e-learning should be the mainstay of distance learners who can pursue learning by placing fingers on a button, and who can access libraries on their mobiles. Academic Counsellors in rural areas must be trained for using free source networks. Free and open source networks, by means of internet links and hyperlinks can be mainstays of learning. The experiment of a journalist Shubnrangshu Chaudhuri, formerly of the Hindustan Times and who now works amongst the folks in Chhattisgarh; with blue tooth for exposing media literacy among rural people should be taken serious note of. We must embark vigorously upon media literacy for our Academic Counsellors and Coordinators living in such areas. North East, especially Meghalaya, where I live has perfect laboratory conditions for such radical innovation.

Dr. Ananya S Guha  
Regional Director,  
IGNOU Regional Centre, Shillong  
nnyguha48@gmail.com

## University of Reddit

### About Reddit

Reddit is a diverse and popular social news networking site which was founded by University of Virginia roommates Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian in 2005. It was acquired by Conde Naste publications in 2006. Reddit has 231 million monthly unique visitors, hailing from over 210 different countries.

The site has content entries which are organized, by areas of interest, in the form of "subreddits". Anyone can create a subreddit. Each subreddit is independent and moderated by a team of volunteers. The topics of subreddit are diverse and include news, gaming, movies, music, books, fitness, food, photosharing, among many others. Registering an account with Reddit is simple and free - one has to create a user name and password; the site does not require an email address to complete the registration. The registered users are referred to as "redditors". The registered users can submit content, in the form of text, blog posts or direct links. To these posted items other registered users can vote for or against them (upvote / downvote) which determines the post's position on the website. Users can post comments on all the post. Everything on Reddit is driven by

“karma,” which is the individual positive and negative point (called upvotes and downvotes) given and received by each member of the site.

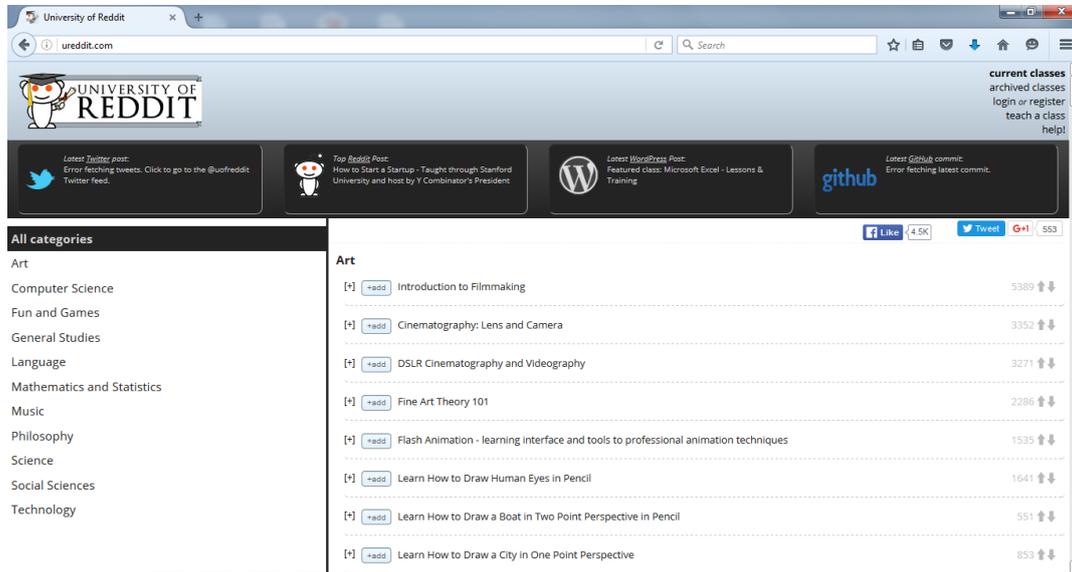


Figure 1: University of Reddit Main Page (<http://ureddit.com/>)

## University of Reddit

University of Reddit is an online education initiative of Reddit which was started in 2010. Formally known as Open Compass, it began as a subreddits. It is now an actual website offering thousands of courses in different subject areas. It functions as a crowd-sourced educational platform where the users of the social news site can voluntarily teach free online courses to other *redditors*. It is an experimental, open-source, peer-to-peer teaching and learning platform which provides free, varied, and easily accessible courses. The focus of the initiative is on teaching, learning, and sharing of knowledge and experience among its users. The educational site provides an organized forum-based space that categorizes learning materials available in the areas of Art, Computer Science, Fun & Games, General Studies, Language, Mathematics & Statistics, Music, Philosophy, Science, and Social Sciences. Within each category are many sub-categories, which focus on particular areas of the genre. According to the creators, UReddit is “the product of free intellectualism and is a haven for the sharing of knowledge. Teachers and students are free to explore any subject that interests them. Unlike a conventional university, University of Reddit strives to make its course offerings free, varied, and easily accessible.

Classes can be taught by a single teacher or by multiple teachers. Users who sign up to teach classes are provided with teacher admin panels. These allow teachers to manage their classes, send mass personalized messages to their students, and access a file hosting service upon request. Courses

offered on the site are hybrids of massive open online courses (MOOCs), and YouTube how-to tutorials and are taught by actual college professors and regular redditors alike.

A list of the courses on offer is provided in the catalog on the main page. To sign up for courses, one has to register for an account on the site to be an official member of that course's roster. Once registered, UReddit allows you to sign up for as many classes as you want and sends you email reminders when new information is posted.

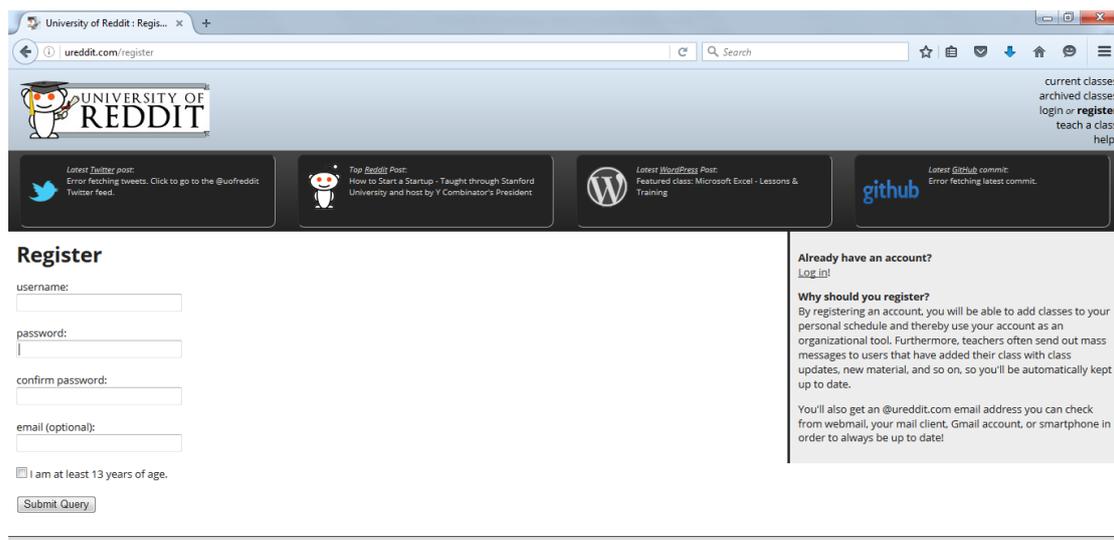


Figure 2: Register Page

To add a course to your schedule, click the "+add" button (located on the left side of the course title). Your schedule can be found by clicking on your username, located on the right side of the navigation bar. Some courses may require you to contact the teacher in order to be able to access the materials. Since there is not a set standard for how to conduct a course, instructors' methods of teaching may vary.

The educators can sign up to teach on any topic academic or non-academic. The user has to first register for an account with the website. Then he/she can create a class by clicking on the "teach a class" link in the top right of the main page. Once you've created a class, you will find a "teacher admin panel" link in the top right. From there, you can manage your class and you can send a mass PM to everyone that has added your class.

Ms. Sujata Santosh  
Assistant Director,  
NCIDE, IGNOU  
Sujata.santosh@ignou.ac.in

## NCIDE

Block G, Zakir Hussain Bhawan,  
New Academic Complex,  
Indira Gandhi National Open University  
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110068

Phone: 011-29536413

Fax: 011-29536398

E-mail: [ncide@inou.ac.in](mailto:ncide@inou.ac.in)

The National Centre for Innovation in Distance Education (NCIDE) was established in December 2005. It is a facility for promoting, supporting, re-engineering and disseminating innovations in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system. The NCIDE is a ground for nurturing bright and inquisitive minds whose ideas and explorations are expected to revolutionise the ODL system to suit the needs of Gennext. The Centre's goal is to develop a culture of continued search for new and innovative solutions to offer seamless education for all, achieve cost efficiency in its operations and provide borderless access to quality education and training.

We look forward to receiving your suggestions for this e-newsletter. We also welcome your contributions for the future issues. Please send us your emails addressed to the Director, NCIDE at: [ncide@ignou.ac.in](mailto:ncide@ignou.ac.in).