to the efficiency of the evaluation system is considered an innovation under this category.

e. Innovations Supporting Convergence of Systems

Innovations supporting convergence of systems include creation of intelligent solutions to address credit transfers, exemptions, transfer, recognition of prior learning, or to consider and approve the grade point average (GPA) to percentage conversion (PC) across the programmes of the University etc.

f. Monitoring and feedback

Quality management plays a key role in developing and maintaining quality in distance education institutes. It deals with the quality of the learning experience and the support services. It helps to ensure the completion rates of studies and diminishes dropout figures and results in satisfied students who may in the future be willing to start new studies. Benchmarking is one form of monitoring and measurement used in quality management. Benchmarking is being highly used in educational organizations to evaluate various aspects of the teaching-learning processes in relation to best practice or innovations. It provides new methods, ideas and tools to improve the effectiveness of the organization. A practice that has markedly improved the quality of the ODL system is considered an innovation under this category.

3.1 Gold Medal 2015: Master of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies: Programme Development

Innovators: Prof. Anu Aneja, Dr. Nilima Srivastava

Team Members: Dr. Himadri Roy, Dr. Smita M Patil and Dr. Sunita Dhal

School/Division: School of Gender Development Studies (SOGDS), IGNOU

Area of Innovation: Programme Development

**Description of the Innovation**

Master of Arts in Women's and Gender Studies (MAWGS) is a pioneer academic programme which addresses the concerns raised by the proponents of both Women's Studies and Gender Studies. The programme aims at providing comprehensive knowledge with the help of concepts, theories and study of socio-cultural, politico-economic factors and psychoanalysis by questioning gender relations, their impact on women and men, thereby opening up vistas of cultural transformation in society. This programme weaves in international perspectives and contextualizes them to Indian scenario. The Women's and Gender Studies (WGS) is offered as a generic programme internationally, but to have a wider learner base and to offer learners the possibility of in depth study, two specializations were created in 2nd year of MAWGS. Thus, offering specialization is another novel attempt which has not been found in the curricula of WGS world over.

Another pioneering effort has been the WGS Online Interactive Forum to provide additional web based support to the learners of the MAGWS programme by creating of an interactive platform for direct interface with the faculty (Programme and Course coordinators). This web based online forum addresses their queries and concerns, provide additional inputs, updates and allow peer learning, bridging barriers of distance, time, and geography. For Programme Coordinators, it is a mechanism to assess efficacy of the self learning material (SLM), learners' understanding of the same and inculcate critiquing of factors/forces responsible for subordination and marginalization of women and men in society.

The features of the MAWGS programme are presented below (Fig 1.):

- The SLM is made visually rich by adding pictures, paintings and weblinks to facilitate understanding of complex theories and the critique of the text in question.
- Cover designs also convey the objectives of the course that learners intend to read.

- Assignments have questions that need learners to read up newspaper articles and youtube uploads to answer questions.
- Additional reading provided for when learners ask for it.
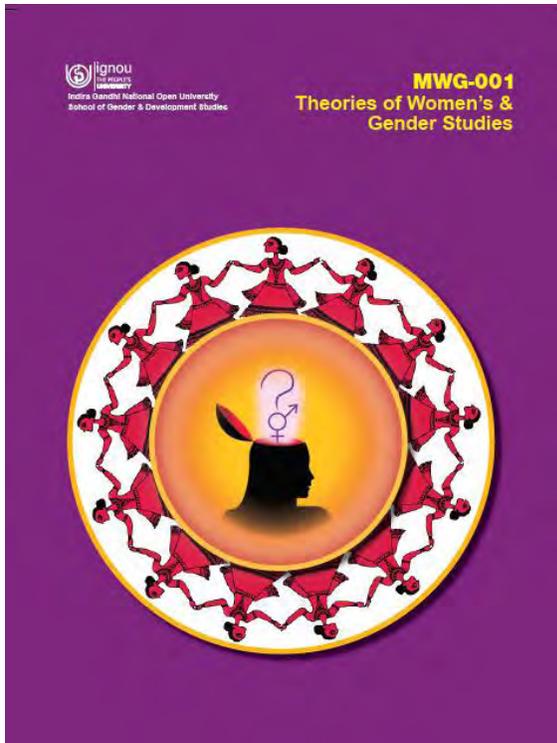
**Figure 1. The cover page of the Master of Arts Women and Gender Studies Self Learning Material.**

Technological Features of the Innovation

The WGS Online Interactive Forum is a totally technology based initiative with the following features (Fig. 2.):

- On line interactive web based educational portal.
- Open to only registered learners of MAWGS.
- Open source (free for users) of providing and receiving additional educational inputs.

- Attractive, innovatively designed web pages based on School's colour code along with imaginative use of cover page of MAWGS study material.
- Moderators (Programme and Course co-ordinators) manage interaction and can regulate the same too.
- Flashing announcements for immediate attention of users.
- 'Unread' posts denoted by a red icon and 'read' ones in green.
- Template layout is interactive and compatible with laptop, mobile and desktops.
- Follows World Wide Web Consortium protocol.
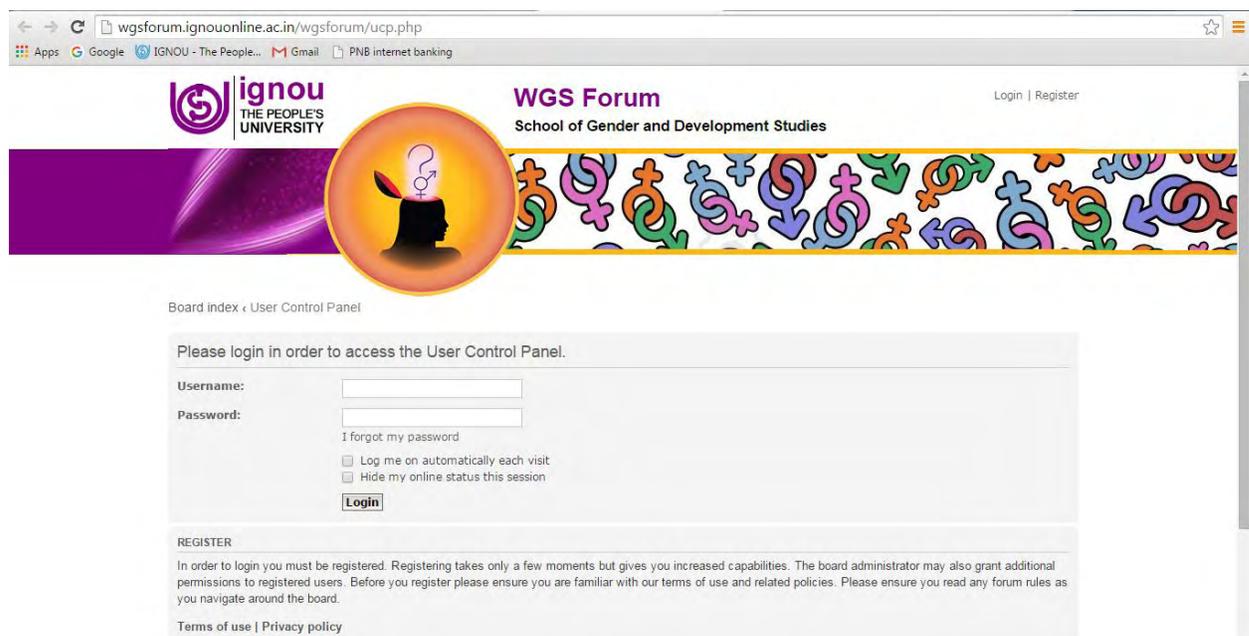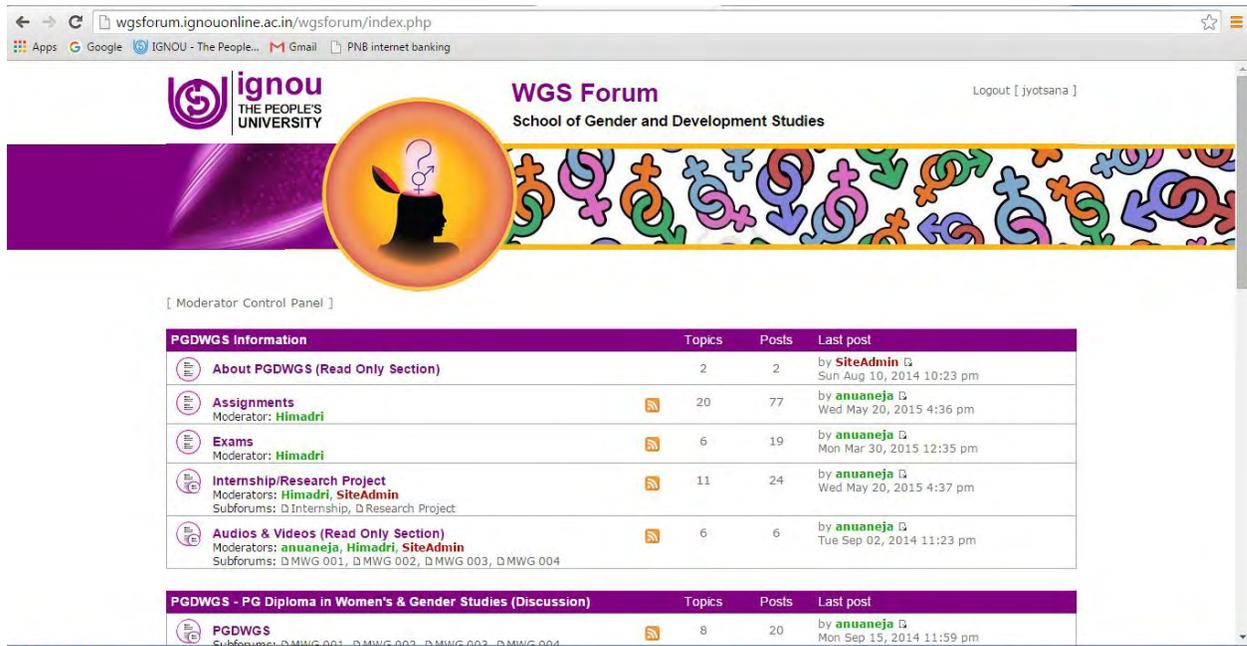
Figure 2. Screenshot of the Women and Gender Studies Online Interactive Forum.

Creative Breakthrough

Innovations with regards to the said programme have been on account of the following attributes:

- The Genesis of the title: Since the mandate of SOGDS has ' gender' with a wider understanding than the 'notional' understanding of gender pertaining to women, the title of the Programme was formulated (1) to keep up with the concerns of a large section of society namely, women, who face subordination, marginalisation and also oppression in certain ways (2) to include a broader academic understanding of gender as a category of analysis.

  Thus, WGS internationally emerged as a disciplinary area of enquiry that retains focus on women's issues within the larger rubric of academic discipline of GS. IGNOU is the only University in India offering a programme in this combined form.

- Programme Designing and Development: MAWGS was designed based on learner centric, bottom-up approach. During the need assessment study various areas of inquiry were proposed based on the current academic trends in

the disciplinary area and the most widely opted ones namely, Literature and Culture and Social Sciences are being offered as specialisation in 2nd year after reading the core foundational courses in the 1st year. Also, between Post Graduate (PG) Diploma and PG Degree, PG Diploma was a more popular choice. Learners can choose to exit after completing the 1st year (two Semesters) and get a diploma in WGS. Others interested in acquiring a MA degree can move on to the chosen specialization.

So,

(1) MAWGS was designed in such a way that all the popular choices were accommodated.

(2) One programme caters to the need of learners from two streams namely, humanities and social sciences.

- Assignments: For one cycle, assignments for MAWGS were made in a conventional format that is, long, medium and short notes types questions based on SLM. A few learners tended to repeatedly copy material verbatim from the SLM or from external sources. The faculty members also felt that given the nature of the course material and its focus on issues of gender equality, it was important to explore creative ways of making assignment questions so that learners are encouraged to connect the readings to lived realities. Thus, MAWGS assignments now regularly incorporate questions which ask the learner to engage with issues beyond the course material, while using the latter as a basis of critical enquiry. For instance, newspaper clippings about relevant matters, articles on gender issues, recent legal rulings related to the status of women, and other related issues are provided to the learners as part of the assignment questions. These questions push the learner to use the study material as a theoretical basis for analyzing/ responding to/ agreeing or disagreeing with the viewpoint presented in the article/ editorial.

- Web based additional academic support to the learners of the Programme: Women and Gender Studies is a niche and emerging area of study in India. In its initial years of launch the Regional Centres (RCs) found it a little difficult to

activate this programme, it being a multi and interdisciplinary programme. Thus, identifying Study Centres (SCs) was a bit difficult for the RCs. To overcome this problem a strategy was developed to provide web based academic support in addition to counselling at the SCs and Programme Study Centres (PSCs) (wherever activated). The WGS Online interactive forum provides a perfect platform for accomplishing this aim. The unique features of this forum are as follows:

a. It is totally in sync with the philosophy of the ODL system.
b. Audio/Visual (A/V) supplementary study material is available at the click of a mouse.
c. Learners can read posts and hold discussions.
d. Interaction with the Faculty members is provided by the online platform, which is generally not happening in the ODL system.
e. Creates a feeling of 'in-group' amongst learners across semesters thus promoting bonding amongst them.
f. The forum functions like a virtual classroom.
g. Learners get personalised attention even in a big group.
h. Individual level of engagement by each learner.
i. No additional financial implications for the University.

Implementation and Impact

Implementation of both the initiatives (MAGWS Programme and the WGS online platform) is cost effective as human and technological resources available with the University have been garnered for launch of MAWGS and the WGS forum. Both the initiatives promote the mandate of SOGDS (addressing broader gender concerns), vision of IGNOU (reaching the unreached for instance the differently able and housewives; and advance and dessiminate learning and knowledge by diversified means including the use of communication teachnology) and philosophy of ODL system (learner centric, overcoming barriers of time and distance, open, flexible) .

Impact of both the initiatives is visible in many different ways as it is widely appreciated by all the stakeholders. The innovations are seen to be having following impact:

MAWGS Programme Design:

- Increase in annual enrolment.

- Due to the innovative and cutting edge design of the Programme, Course writers/editors and other academics who worked on MAWGS are ready to be associated with the School in various other capacities, such as Resource Persons for Interactive Radio Counselling (IRC), production of A/V material for the Programme, Experts for developing other programmes in the School, and as School Board members.

WGS Online Interactive Forum:

- In spite of optional registration by the learners, the forum has generated good participation by way of leading /initiating discussions, replying to the posts, raising their queries and concerns and replying to ones raised by either the faculty or other learners.

- The learners have also posted their own publication and pieces of creative work (poems, articles etc.) and receive responses on the same.

- From time to time the faculty members update developments related to issues raised in the text (for example, when the Bill on Sexual Harassment at Workplace was changed to an Act in 2012, the same was posted in the forum).

- Faculty initiate debate on contemporary situations and incidents that impact gender relations like Nirbhaya case, Verma Committee report etc. which enables learners to discuss current issues and provide hand-holding to distant learners by appreciating or adding up to the discussion amongst them.

- The forum broadens the exposure and experience of learners vis-à-vis learners to learners and faculty to learners and vica versa learning opportunities in ODL.

Thus, the initiative has provided a better platform than the conventional classroom learning experience (which has the bindings of time and location) while providing quality educational inputs.

Scalability of the Innovation

- User-friendly template
- Quick time response

Sustainability of the Innovation

Both the initiatives are totally sustainable as resources required to keep up are well within the purview of the University system and not constrained by factors like time, technology or human efforts that affect sustainability of any initiative. There is no extra cost involved so the two initiatives are 'on ground' cost effective. The only requirement for sustainability is presence of committed human effort which is ensured by the concerned faculty.

Alignment with the Concept of ODL system

Both the initiatives are totally aligned to the requirement of ODL system and in fact promote the efficacy and philosophy of ODL.

Highlight

- The programme design which incorporates core, fundamental courses in the 1st year and two separate specializations in the 2nd year is a unique, novel and previously unexplored feature for any such programme in WGS.
- Incorporation of online educational portal as an additional academic support to the learners is another pioneering effort and has strengthened the overall success of the Programme.
- Innovations have also been attempted in format of assignments and exam questions to encourage original thinking , creative and critical analysis on the part of the learner.
- The programme has been designed with a futuristic perspective along with emphasis on high quality of academic inputs and transforming realities at the societal level.

4. Contenders

There were two other close contenders for the Gold Medal. These were judged to be the second and the third in the following order:

a. Mr. Ravi Ayyagari (Applicant), Arif Hasan Naqvi, Virendra Chhikara, R.Sekhar, and Amitosh Dubey (Team members)- Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC), IGNOU

b. Dr. P.V.K. Sasidhar, Dr. Nehal A Farooquee and Prof. B.K. Pattanaik- School of Extension and Development Studies

The second entry was awarded the Certificate of Merit by the University. The details of these innovations are provided below.

3.2 Teaching Learning Targeted for 21st Century: Instructional Design & Delivery

Innovator: Mr. Ravi Ayyagari

Team Member: Arif Hasan Naqvi, Virendra Chhikara, R. Sekhar, and Amitosh Dubey

School/Division: Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC), IGNOU

Area of Innovation: Instructional Design & Delivery

Rank: 2nd among 8 entries.

Description of the Innovation

The team conceived this prototype that enables developing high quality instructional design for ODL. It is a combination of virtual set, High Definition (HD) technology and multiple media. The produced educational content compatible for delivery through live broadcasting and through web based platforms. It is easily accessible online, offline and on demand via television, computer, iPad and mobile phone for the learner.