

# Industry experts, retired folks to drive academia at varsity

■ A recent UGC directive mandates this inclusion; SPPU scholars applaud the move, say institute is already set on this path

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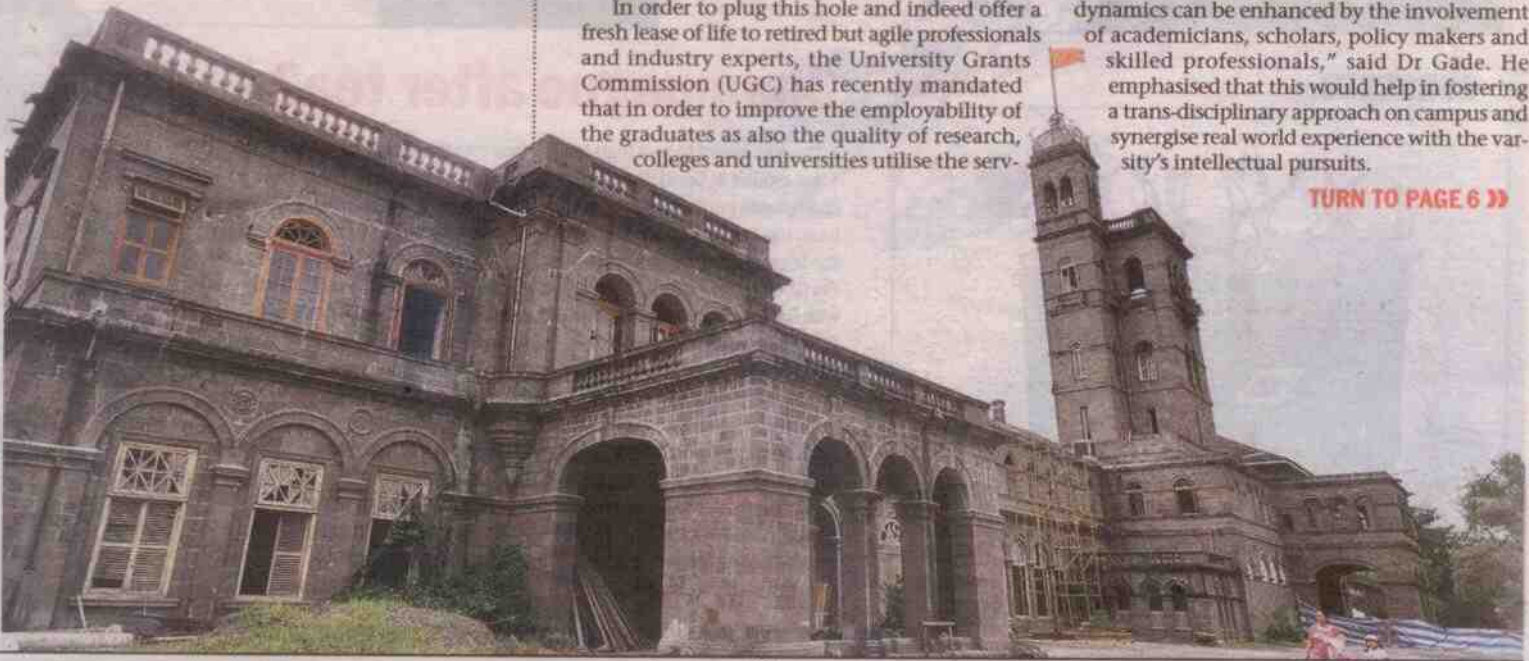
That Indian universities — comprising both technical and non-technical institutes — have failed to produce a work-force that is industry ready is well-known. What is also common knowledge is the lacuna in the numbers of efficient staff in Indian universities and colleges. For example, of the 550 sanctioned posts for its various departments, the Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) itself has a deficiency of 150, thanks to red-tapism.

In order to plug this hole and indeed offer a fresh lease of life to retired but agile professionals and industry experts, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has recently mandated that in order to improve the employability of the graduates as also the quality of research, colleges and universities utilise the serv-

ices of professionals outside the educational system. It has encouraged the inclusion of reputable scientists, engineers, physicians, advocates, artists, civil servants, and professionals from various fields so that their hands-on experience can be of use for both conventional, vocational and research courses.

Stating that UGC was a tad late on the uptake, SPPU's vice chancellor, Dr Wasudev Gade, said the institution had already begun to take baby steps in that direction. "The objective is to develop a useful and viable collaboration between institutions and industry which would enhance the quality of education. Classroom dynamics can be enhanced by the involvement of academicians, scholars, policy makers and skilled professionals," said Dr Gade. He emphasised that this would help in fostering a trans-disciplinary approach on campus and synergise real world experience with the varsity's intellectual pursuits.

TURN TO PAGE 6 »



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The UGC has put out a roster of institutions from where professionals might be drawn — Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR), Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) are some. Apart from this, it has also asked to focus on individuals working in central and state public sector undertakings, business corporations, civil servants, scientists and engineers working in organised and unorganised sectors, known for their hands-on expertise.

Dr V B Gaikwad, director, Board of Colleges and University Development (BCUD), of SPPU, said, "Although we have integrated such professionals into the system, there is need to spread the word in colleges where students can benefit with the knowledge and experience of such people." In environment science, for instance, Dr Dilip Boralkar, an expert in the field of environment protection with a domain experience of 38 years, has been brought in as adjunct professor. Then, there is Dr Bharat Bhushan, an eminent scientist in environmental planning and currently professor at YASHADA.

Through his tenure here, Dr Boralkar, has been offering practical experience to MSc (Environment) students, as they work on municipal waste management programmes. In a career spanning 40 years, he has worked at various positions with the government — from senior scientist with Maharashtra Pollution Control Board, to senior scientist in Central Pollution Board. This is his first foray into academics. "I offer the students hands-on experience on waste management, industrial pollution and water contamination. Mere classroom study would not have readied them with such practical know how," he said.

A veteran scientist, Dr Dinesh Amalnerkar, who retired as executive director with Centre for Material Electronics Technology (C-MET), applauded the UGC's move and evinced interest in academics, should opportunity present itself. "Since I am an expert in application-based study, I could help students enhance

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DR WASUDEV GADE, SPPU VICE-CHANCELLOR

their practical knowledge while working on a project," said Dr Amalnerkar.

Dr Gajanan Kharate, dean of the varsity's engineering branch, maintained that having adjunct professors in engineering branches is always a win-win situation for students. "It is quite difficult to bring people, who are already working in the industry as they are too busy in their work, so it is advisable for the colleges to bring adjunct faculty who may have taken voluntary retirement from the company and have a strong expertise in their respective disciplines," said Dr Kharate. He added that various colleges have already brought such professionals into their embrace, but the UGC mandate would help spread the word so that the quality of teaching as well as employability can be enhanced.

Dr Gade also called attention to the fact that this would help to tackle the issue of the crunch in teaching staff that colleges across the country have been facing over the last four to five years, as the rosters for teachers' recruitment have not been issued and subsequently, no fresh recruitments made.

Dr Ram Takwale, former vice chancellor of SPPU and a noted educationist, said the current education structure puts emphasis on theory, which fails when it comes to problem solving. "When you shift from theory to application, you will need people who have hands-on experience, who will emphasis on practicals rather than theory," he said.

"I think the entire approach towards teaching needs a drastic shift so that students are made industry-ready. The UGC's initiative is welcome, although, while implementing it in the academics, the objectives should be clearly defined — a clear shift from the existing content-based approach," said Dr Takwale.