

Indraprastha College for Women

Equal Opportunity Cell & Enabling Unit

Report 2019-2020.

Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi is unique as it is one of the oldest constituent Colleges of the University serving the cause of women empowerment through higher education. Besides the above, the College also has a special place for students with disabilities. Accordingly, the College has instituted the Enabling Unit to cater to the students with special needs. In line with the UGC guidelines, the Enabling Unit works in close coordination with the Equal Opportunity Cell.

The Equal Opportunity Cell (EOC) and the Enabling Unit (EU), with the active support and constant encouragement from the College administration, have been working as a support system offering for students with disabilities all services under one-roof. In an endeavour to provide a barrier-free campus, the College keeps accessibility as one of the priorities. In recognition to the efforts the College has made in the areas of accessibility and universal design, thanks to the visionary leadership of the current Principal who took the issues of disability services and accessibility to the forefront, the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) and Mphasis (a Multi-National Corporation) selected the College for NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Award 2015 in the category of the best institution providing barrier-free environment.

The College has admitted a total of 18 students with disabilities: 9 in Under Graduation and 9 in Post-graduation programmes for the academic year 2019-20. Like last year, the College admitted another student with Specific Learning Disability (SLD) — a disability newly recognised under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016.

In line with the larger vision of the College, the EOC and EU every year conduct various programmes such as: seminars, skill development workshops, cultural events, training and orientation programmes for students with disabilities enrolled in the College. Given below is

a summary report of the major events, distinct facilities and services run under EOC and EU in the academic year 2019-20.

Facilities and Services:

The College has a well-equipped special computer unit for students with disabilities. The unit contains six PCs, braille printer, a flat-bed scanner and Lex Air Camera (a photo scanner) and a LaserJet printer, all to assist the students with visual disabilities in their day-to-day educational requirements. Students with visual disabilities are also issued notebooks/laptops and Angel Pro DAISY Players on returnable basis. The College freely supplies braille sheet for students with visual disabilities to be able to take class notes in braille script. The College arranges free transportation for all the students with disabilities to travel back to their destinations during the winter month examinations.

The coordinator, Enabling Unit has in the beginning of the academic session conducted a need-based assessment test and accordingly designed a syllabus for computer training sessions to be run subsequently. Mr. Vidhur Patel was appointed as Computer Instructor on contractual basis during the odd and winter semesters of the academic year 2019-20 to conduct the customised computer training sessions in order to assist the students with visual disabilities who generally come with different levels of skill sets. Periodic assessment tests were conducted to test the progress of the students. The Computer Instructor conducted an in-house skill test for all students with visual disabilities to gauge their levels of computer proficiency at the end of the odd semester. The students have themselves appreciated the initiative as they are today much more confident in their computer skills.

Coordinator, Enabling Unit and Convener, EOC, besides being available on all weekdays in person, also conduct meetings for students with disabilities every week in the Enabling Unit. The weekly meetings proved to be a great platform for information sharing, to hear grievances and to find out quick solutions.

Like last year, the EOC and EU in collaboration with the College NSS made two NSS volunteers available from 2:30-3:30 PM on all working days in the Enabling Unit. The NSS

volunteers assist the needy students with visual disabilities in all their reading and writing tasks. Ms. Archana Mina from the library has also been available from 2:30-3:30 PM in the Enabling Unit to facilitate issuing and returning of books and other equipment's.

It is a matter of encouragement to note that Ms. Jyoti Gupta, B.A Political Science III year Hons. Ms. Ruchi Dubey, B.A Political Science II year Hons were elected as President and Vice President of Enabling Unit and are playing an active role in the College Student Union.

In strict compliance with the directions of UGC, the College makes a provision for the allotment of an extra 20-minute time per hour to all students who employed scribes to assist them in writing the exams.

The College arranged transportation during November-December 2019 examination for the day-scholars with visual disabilities to reach their destinations safely in the evenings.

It is a matter of immense satisfaction that the College administration takes every possible effort to facilitate external funding to support students with disabilities. In the academic year 2019-20, Help the Blind Foundation, a Non-Governmental Organisation that offers financial support to the deserving students with visual disabilities across the country, selected a total of 46 students with visual disabilities from the College for their scholarship and sanctioned them a total of Rs.6,16,000/- (Rupees Six lakh sixteen thousand only). Additionally, All India Confederation of the Blind also offered a merit-based scholarship for 24 students with visual disabilities.

Human Resource Development

Dr. BR. Alamelu, a faculty in the Department of English (and also currently Coordinator, Enabling Unit in the College) teaches a 6-credit course titled: 'Communication for Special Needs' for the students of BMMMC, Semester-VI. Ms. Ritu Panda — a qualified trainer in Sign Language — takes classes on Indian Sign Language. It is a matter of pride that IP College is the first institute of higher education in the country to have offered a full course on disability in general and special communication needs in particular at the undergraduate level. The first, second and third batches of students enrolled for the course have had inspiring testimonies to offer. Along with a carefully designed, textual introduction and

analysis of disability, the students had hands-on instruction in Braille, Indian Sign Language, white cane mobility and other accessible modes of communication deployed predominantly by persons with disabilities.

Events in the Academic Year 2019-20

EOC and EU of the College conducted the annual Orientation Programme for the Semester I new entrants on 22ND August, 2019. Students were first briefed about all library facilities which include: Braille books, scanning facility, issuing of Braille sheets, book bank facility etc. The Convenor of EOC and Coordinator of EU took all the participants for an accessible College tour, wherein the new entrants were detailed the accessibility features of the College and techniques of easy navigation around. The Principal also distributed certificates of participation to the students who successfully completed the online courses on employability skills conducted in collaboration with Arise Impact during January-April 2019.

Like every year, a fifteen-day Mobility Orientation Programme was conducted for students with visual disabilities of Semester I from 21 August to 07 September 2019. Mr. Anil Kumar, a certified professional in Mobility Orientation, conducted the said training and offered students with visual disabilities a detailed orientation in the accessible navigation around the College.

Help the Blind Foundation conducted interviews for merit-based scholarships on 29 August 2019, in which a total of 47 students appeared. Of the 47, 46 students were selected for the same.

Ms. Shikha Agarwal, member, EOC and a faculty at the Department of Computer Science of our College conducted a workshop on IP Lecture Hall — a mobile application developed and operated by the College — on 01 October 2019.

A group of students from Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi, visited the College on 18 October 2019 to learn about the accessible environment in the College. They also interacted with students with visual disabilities as part of their project work.

The EOC and EU organised a fifteen-day self-defence skills workshop for students with disabilities in collaboration with the Special Police Unit for Women and Children, Delhi Police, from 15 October 2019 to 31 October 2019. Ms. Bharti, a Head Constable deputed by the Delhi Special Police conducted the training sessions. On the successful completion of the workshop, each student also received a certificate of participation on 08 November 2019.

Mr. Irfan Jami, an independent film maker visited the College on 01 November 2019 and interacted with the students with visual disabilities for his film. In his two-hour discussion, he touched upon various aspects of life with disability and as had an expansive discussion on the story he was writing for his film centred around women with visual disabilities.

Mr. Abhishek Syal, the Founder and CEO, Arise Impact, on his visit to India, visited the College on 13 November 2019 and interacted with the principal, faculty and students with visual disabilities. Having been briefed about the activities of EOC and EU, he expressed his admiration and gratitude towards the College administration for their active support and special efforts made for the empowerment of students with disabilities.

The EOC and EU as a new initiative this year enabled students with disabilities to take an active part in Prakriti Bazaar 2020 organised by the Eco Club of the College on 15 February 2020. The students were facilitated to put up a stall and marketed the eco-friendly, handmade products such as knitted woollen table mats and socks, fabric roses, bookmarks and hairpins. Students also showcased their talents through musical performances and poetry recitation. Special thanks are to the members of Project RISE for their active cooperation and assistance in executing the event.

The EOC and EU conducted Samarthya —an inter-College, annual cultural fest on 27 February 2020. The fest saw the participation of around 220 students with disabilities from various Colleges of University of Delhi. Quiz, Folk singing and Play competitions were conducted, and cash prizes along with certificates were distributed to the winners in each competition.

Ms. Jacky J. Bonney, the founder of Maximising Employment to the Service of the Handicapped (MESH) delivered a special talk titled: “Inclusion and Fair Trade”. The talk emphasised on the need for consumer awareness at the time of purchase. As customers, individuals should make choices that meet the real needs of end producers, and this should be factored as a fair trade practice.

Skilling Initiatives

In an effort to build the employability skills of students with disabilities in general and students with visual disabilities in particular, the EOC and EU has been collaborating with Arise Impact — an NGO founded by Mr. Abhishek Syal, an MBA Graduate from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA — that offers a plethora of online courses for students with disabilities. Streamlining the collaboration, the EOC and EU in the current academic year initiated a project RISE (Raising Inclusive Skills and Employability). While Ms. Bhavika Kohli, Associate Head of Arise Impact, Delhi Operations, and also a member of United Nations Global Volunteering Team, heads the RISE, A group of ten students of the College also pledged their support and participate actively in the project. The project RISE has run a total of three online courses on employability skills, each targeting the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year students with disabilities respectively.

The courses offered during the academic year 2019-2020 include:

- 1) English conversational skills for the students of Semester I, (9 September to 25 October 2019);
- 2) Professional Introduction for the students of Semester III, (9 September to 25 October 2019);
- 3) In-Person Interview for the students of Semester V, (9 September to 25 October 2019).
- 4) Professional Introduction for the students of Semester II, (16 February 2020 to 22 April 2020);
- 5) Resume Building for the students of Semester IV, (16 February 2020 to 22 April

2020);

6) Job Competency Training for the students of Semester VI, (20 February 2020 to 22 April 2020).

The said courses were offered through WhatsApp study group, wherein students were provided with the reading material in accessible medium instantaneously. Face-to-face contact classes were also held on a weekly basis so as to obtain the student progress and clarify doubts. On 8 November 2019, the Principal distributed certificates of completion of the first three courses offered during the odd Semester 2019.

EOC and EU Initiatives during COVID-19 Lockdown:

Ever since a nation-wide lockdown was imposed in the middle of March 2020, the EOC and EU coordinators began to get in touch with students with disabilities of the College who went back home and continued their studies online. Every possible attempt was made to facilitate access to information and other necessary procedures for students in need. IP Lecture Hall, a mobile app designed exclusively for the use of students with print disabilities in the College, has been a great benefit for students to have easy access to the audio reading material during the lockdown. Ms. Dolly Jain, Coordinator EOC in particular took a special effort to fill up the online examination forms for all students with disabilities who found it very difficult to access the form and fill it online due to poor internet connectivity and other issues of accessibility. Given the extraordinary situation the COVID-19 has created, the college took a special initiative to deposit scholarship cheques directly into the student bank accounts so as to facilitate students to have timely access to financial resources. Special thanks are to Ms. Jain, the Convener EOC, who took time to compile the required data in this regard and make it available to the college administration.

EOC and EU in collaboration with Arise Impact and under its Project RISE conducted an Inter-College webinar on the theme, “How Persons With Disabilities Should Protect Themselves and Stay Safe During COVID-19”, 17 April 2020. While Dr. BR. Alamelu, Coordinator Enabling Unit delivered the welcome address and gave a brief overview of EOC and EU activities, The Vice-Principal Dr. Jyoti Trehan Sharma

offered the opening remarks. Dr. Darshan, Gynaecologist, PGI Chandigarh, delivered the talk and interacted with the audience. Dr. Darshan, besides throwing light on COVID-19 and modes of its transmission, shed light on the specific instructions persons with visual disabilities should follow during the pandemic.

EOC and EU organised an international webinar on 1st May 2020 with Dr. Michele Friedner, faculty in Department of Comparative Human Development, University of Chicago as the guest speaker. Dr. Friedner delivered a talk on “Disability and Normality: The Case of Cochlear Implants in India”. The Principal delivered introductory remarks. A total of 62 participants from across the country joined the event online. Drawing inferences from her fieldwork in India, Dr. Friedner dwelt with the issues of affordability, accessibility and procurement and distribution of cochlear implants. She also highlighted the nuances of bringing up children with hearing disability.

The coordinators of Equal Opportunity Cell and Enabling Unit wish to place on record their sincere appreciation for the committee members and other co-opted members for their cooperation throughout the year in translating our goals into concrete actions. None of the events briefly highlighted above would have been possible without the kind assistance, wise guidance and the firm support of our Principal. The Equal Opportunity Cell and the Enabling Unit owe special thanks to the office of the Principal and other administrative staff.

Ms. Dolly Jain

Convener

Equal Opportunity Cell

Dr. BR. Alamelu

Coordinator

Enabling Unit