

# **SUBJECT REVIEW REPORT**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEMOGRAPHY**



***FACULTY OF ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO***

26<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> January 2009

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## 1. SUBJECT REVIEW PROCESS

The subject review process introduced by the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Directors and the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka, now directed by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council, has been designed to evaluate the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline, for both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in a university. It specifically focuses on the quality of the student learning experience and student achievement.

Higher education is a 'public good' and plays a crucial role in the economic and social development in Sri Lanka. As public institutions engaged in the delivery of this public good, the universities in Sri Lanka have a responsibility to maintain and improve upon the high standards and the quality of higher education.

This report presents the findings of a review of the quality of education provided by the **Department of Demography at the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka**. The review was conducted at the Department from 26th to 28th of January, 2009 adhering to the guidelines provided in the *Quality Assurance Handbook for Sri Lankan Universities*, published by the CVCD and University Grants Commission in July 2002. The review process was based on the Self Evaluation Report (SER) submitted by the Department of Demography and supported by the information gathered from the three-day site visit made by the review team to the department.

The SER has been prepared under following headings:

1. Introduction
2. Aims, Learning Outcomes and Program Details
3. Students, Staff and Facilities
4. Curriculum Design, Content and Review
5. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods
6. Quality Progress and Achievements of Students
7. Use of Students' Feedback
8. Postgraduate Studies
9. Peer observation
10. Skills development
11. Academic Guidance and Counseling

In the review process attention was focused on the following eight aspects as given the *Quality Assurance Handbook*:

1. Curriculum design, content and review.
2. Teaching learning and assessment methods.
3. Quality of students including student progress and achievements.
4. Extent and use of student feedback, qualitative and quantitative.
5. Postgraduate studies.
6. Peer observation.
7. Skills development, and
8. Academic guidance and counseling.

The evaluation of eight aspects was supplemented by the information gathered at the,

- discussions held with the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Head of Department of Demography, academic staff and undergraduate students and non-academic and support staff
- observation of departmental facilities (lecture rooms, staff rooms, office space etc.) and library
- observation of teaching sessions
- review of documents available at the department, such as examination papers, marking schemes, minutes of the departmental meetings, publications by members of the academic staff

Each of the eight aspects was judged as good or satisfactory or unsatisfactory paying attention to the strengths, good practices and weaknesses found in each area. Taking into consideration the judgments given to the eight aspects, an overall judgment was given as confidence or limited confidence or no confidence.

## 2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE DEPARTMENT

The University of Colombo, established in 1942, is the oldest campus in Sri Lanka located in the heart of the city occupying over fifty acres of prime land. In keeping with its motto *Buddhi Sarvatra Bhrajate* (Wisdom shines forth everywhere), the University of Colombo strives to maintain academic excellence in all areas of study.

The University has over 35 Departments of Study in its seven Faculties - Arts, Law, Education, Management & Finance, Medicine, Science and Graduate Studies - which undertake regular courses of studies that are periodically reviewed and updated. Several extension programmes and certificate courses are held to cater to the developmental needs of the country. The University has also entered into several link programmes with foreign Universities. In addition to re-organizing the traditional undergraduate and graduate courses, the University has embarked on an ambitious extension programme maximizing on its advantageous position as the metropolitan University in Sri Lanka. In order to develop further this aspect of its academic activities a Faculty of Graduate Studies was established in 1987.

The academic institutions that are directly linked to the University of Colombo are Sripalee campus, Institute of Indigenous Medicine (IIM), National Institute of Library and Information Science (NILIS), Post Graduate Institute of Medicine (PGIM), University of Colombo School of Computing (UCSC), Institute of Human Resources Advancement (IHRA) and Institute of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology.

**The Faculty of Arts** is the largest faculty in the University of Colombo in terms of student enrolment. The faculty has eight academic departments, namely, Demography, Economics, English, Geography, History and International Relations, Political Science and Public Policy, Sinhala and Sociology. The Faculty also has five Units. Apart from undergraduate BA courses, several Departments offer programs for Certificate courses, Postgraduate Diplomas, Masters, M. Phil and Ph.D degrees. Many students who successfully complete General and Special Degrees in Bachelor of Arts eventually register for postgraduate degree programs offered by the Faculty.

The Faculty of Arts has responded in various ways to the challenges and problems of higher education and employment. The introduction of the Course Unit System in 1998 was a major

step towards offering greater flexibility to students in terms of selection of courses, their duration, new methods of teaching, learning and evaluation. The establishment of a Student Computer Unit and Computer Teaching Unit within the Faculty has enabled students to improve computer skills - an essential requirement for the current economic and academic environment. Many students specializing in subjects such as Geography, Economics, Sociology and International Relations offer Computer Applications as a regular course unit. The English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) provides undergraduates with a working knowledge of English through its Proficiency Courses in English.

**The Department of Demography** was established within the University of Colombo originally as the Demographic Training and Research Unit (DTRU) in 1973 under UNFPA patronage. The main objective of the unit was to initiate a training and research programme to build up a nucleus of competent personnel in and outside the University who could develop extensive demographic teaching and research program in Sri Lanka. Initially the emphasis was to be on academic courses, but it was envisaged that the Unit would be in due course be entrusted with the function of supervising and servicing research projects in the field and advising various Ministries on matters relating to population and family planning. Subsequently, the demand for courses in population studies in different study programs of other universities was fulfilled by the DTRU academic staff. Within the University of Colombo the Unit developed its study program in three stages as follows:

The Department of Demography offers demography for the Bachelor's Degree in three different ways. First, Demography can be offered as a major subject of the General Degree programme. Second, students can follow a Special Degree in Demography. Third, the course units offered by the department can be taken as elective units by the students who are following a General Degree programme or the Special a Degree in another subject.

A student following the Special Degree in Demography is required to offer a minimum of 42 course units of which 26 are course units offered by the Department of Demography.. An undergraduate can access the subject of Demography for the General Degree in two ways; 1) as a Principal subject, and, 2) as a third subject of the degree program. In the case of former the student is required to offer a minimum of 10 course units. If the student offers demography as the third subject he/she is required to take 7 course units from demography. In both cases, DMG 1101 viz. Introduction to Demography offered during the first year is compulsory.

### **3. AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

#### **3.1. Aims**

The overall aim of the study program conducted by the Department of Demography is to provide students with a sound knowledge of theoretical, applied and practical aspects of Demography with the objective of producing the potential personnel required for the country to handle various aspects of the subject of Demography, namely teaching, training, consultancy and research within the national development perspective. In doing so the main strategy would be to understand the theory, structure and practice of the subject of Demography in the national context keeping up with the advances in the subject internationally.

In the above context the Department provides:

1. Undergraduate and post graduate degree programs that offer high quality learning experience-exposing students to recent advances of the subject of Demography.
2. Comprehensive step-by-step learning of the subject within the course unit structure of the Faculty of Arts enabling students to develop their potential to achieve their academic and professional interests.
3. Encouragement to students to develop a knowledge base and the required skills in the subject of Demography and to be well placed to successfully compete in the job market to meet the needs of potential employers.
4. Opportunities for students to gather a knowledge in Demography which is an interdisciplinary subject related to a number of other subjects in their life long learning process.
5. Responsive, co-operative and enthusiastic academic and non-academic staff along with a supportive departmental environment conducive to enthusiastic learning with high standard.
6. A stimulating opportunity for students from other departments within the Faculty of Arts to learn the subject of Demography and also providing ad hoc visiting lectures in Demography for students of Departments in other Faculties as and when required.
7. Support for the academic staff in their career development through training and scholarship programs.
8. Updating the structure, syllabi and subject material in different course units as and when required keeping up with the recent developments of the subject of Demography.

### **3.2 Learning Outcomes**

On successful completion of any particular study programme the students should have:

- Gained a knowledge and conceptual understanding of theoretical, applied and practical aspects taught in the program.
- Learnt how this knowledge and understanding can be applied practically.
- Developed a range of personal skills in undertaking teaching, training, consultancy and research as the case may be.
- Learnt technical and other related skills in handling data.

## **4. FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW TEAM**

### **4.1. Curriculum Design, Content and Review**

Main areas of the subject of demography are covered in the curriculum. A conspicuous character of the curriculum is its emphasis on quantitative analysis. Apart from the specific areas that emphasizes the core of demography, attention has been paid to include related areas of emphasis such as Population and Development, Social Demography, Human Resource Development, Population and Environment and Population and Disaster Management in order to strengthen the subject's multidisciplinary nature. At the same time, some course units in demography have been made compulsory to ensure the core subject matter within the discipline. In general, the review team was of the view that the subject contents of the course units offered for the Degree programme, both General and Special, are sufficient and appropriate for the degree program.

The Department of Demography conducts lectures in **Sinhala** medium. The **English** medium students follow lectures delivered in Sinhala and the examination papers are answered in

English medium. However, it is observed that some lecturers in the department utilize audio visuals prepared both in Sinhala and English. It must also be noted that in 2007, the Faculty of Arts has taken a policy decision to conduct lectures in English medium, by 2010. At the same time, some lecturers (mostly junior) expressed their apprehension in delivering lectures in English.

The course unit entitled 'Dissertation' (weighted as two course units) to be offered in the fourth year of the Special Degree program allows students to exhibit their intellectual independence and confidence in conducting, preparing and presenting a research study of their own carried out under the supervision of a member of the academic staff. It provides an opportunity for students to apply the theoretical knowledge obtained in the class room. Similarly, the 'Internship' allotted an equivalent value is embedded as a compulsory course unit of the degree program..

The designing of curriculum and syllabi is a collective task. Although an individual member of the academic staff takes the initiative, the objectives, content and assessment scheme related to the new syllabi are discussed at the staff meeting and necessary amendments are made. Then it is submitted to the Faculty Board and the Senate for approval.

There is also an Annual Curriculum Review meeting at the Faculty Level. However, not all members of the staff but the Head of Department and Senior members of the staff can take part in this exercise. Thus the Head of Department is responsible for obtaining the responses, comments and suggestions of the members of the staff and present them at the review meeting.

*The review team is of the view that the curriculum design, content and review of the Department can be judged as GOOD.*

#### **4.2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods.**

There are **five categories** of students offering demography in the University of Colombo in any particular year. They are as follows: Demography Special Degree students, students specialising in other subjects offering demography course units, the General Degree students who offer demography as a principal subject, students offer demography as the third subject and students who offer demography as an elective unit.

##### **Teaching and learning activities**

The department uses a number of teaching methods with a view to achieving the stated learning outcomes. The conventional methods that impart subject-specific knowledge and skills include lectures, assignments and discussion classes. The field trip provides an opportunity to test the acquired knowledge through the course unit Research Methodology. Although, there is a necessity for field activities to enhance the research practicum, the lack of financial provisions appears to hamper the further enhancement of this rewarding activity.

In the delivery of lectures it was observed that lecturers were able to attract the attention and participation of students. Almost all of them use Overhead Projectors and the white board effectively. However, in some visual presentations illegibility was witnessed. Also, in some lecture theatres acoustics were inadequate. It must have been more effective if the multi-media projectors could be used in teaching. Only in one class room (the Seminar room) a multi-media projector could be seen.

Also, due to the massive size of the classes it seemed difficult to maintain interaction with students. In the case of Special Degree students this creates a problem. At present, Special Degree students are following lectures with the General Degree students and the average size of a class is about 250. Special Degree students need interaction with the lecturer and special attention but the size of the class does not warrant it.

Because of the large numbers the students of the newly commenced Special Degree program appear to be facing an 'identity crisis' since they feel deprived of adequate staff-student interaction and attention.

### **Assessment methods**

The scheme of assessment currently used in the evaluation of course units are as follows:

End of semester examination -	60%
Mid-semester examination -	20%
Assignments -	20%

Apart from the End of Semester examination which carries 60 marks, the allocation of the remaining 40 marks is decided by the lecturer concerned.

The method of assessment provides an opportunity for students to exhibit their skills and score marks.

***It is the view of the review team that the teaching, learning and assessment methods adopted by the department can be judged as GOOD.***

### **4.3 Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements**

The department has made necessary arrangements to ensure that good quality students are selected for the special degree demography program. The selection of students to read a special degree in Demography is based on their first year examination results. The requirement is to have at least two 'B+' passes for the two **Demography** course units followed in the first year. In the last year, only 28 students out of a total 130 applicants who have scored high marks have been selected to read the Special degree programme. From the very beginning, these students are provided with opportunities to maintain a cordial relationship with the members of the staff with a view to creating a conducive teaching and learning environment.

The performance of students is monitored at several occasions during the program in order to know whether they are experiencing problems and to ensure that they are suitably equipped to proceed to the next level of the program. The monitoring measures comprise the records of attendance, marks for assignments/projects, mid-semester examination and the end-semester examination.

According to the data furnished by the department the students following the demography as a subject achieve a high level of success. During the academic year 2007/2008 a large number of students (in the Faculty of Arts) who had earned first classes in other subjects had offered course units in demography. Of the students who have obtained first class passes in the academic year 2007/2008 in six departments of the Faculty of Arts 50 percent have offered demography course units. Also, over 70 percent of the students who obtained first

classes in the General Degree in Arts program in the same academic year have offered demography as a subject. However, no comment could be made of the qualitative progress of the Special Degree program in Demography as it has run less than a semester.

***It is the view of the review team that the quality of students, student progress and achievements can be judged as GOOD.***

#### **4.4. Extent and use of Student Feedback**

Although the Faculty of Arts has introduced a common questionnaire to obtain students' views/feedback on teaching and course design/structure it is inoperative in the department at present. Members of the academic staff in the Department of Demography, therefore, rely on alternative methods to have a feedback on their teaching. Occasionally, at the end of a course unit, students are asked to express their views on the lecture program. Students' responses to performance of lecturers have been gathered but it was not clear how they have been utilized to enhance the quality of teaching.

Also, members of the staff adopt various qualitative methods, especially through cordial discussions with students on a variety of occasions such as field trips to obtain their views on teaching.

***It is the view of the review team that the extent and use of student feedback can be judged as SATISFACTORY.***

#### **4.5. Postgraduate Studies**

The weakest area of the Department is postgraduate studies. Although the DTRU, the predecessor of the department of Demography, was established to conduct postgraduate program no postgraduate program is functionally operational at present. The last graduand of the postgraduate diploma has received his/her diploma as far back as in 2003. However, nearly 100 postgraduate diplomates have been produced by the DTRU/Department since 1975. Also, only a single MA/M Phil graduate has been produced to date.

***It is the view of the review team that postgraduate studies at the Department can be judged as UNSATISFACTORY.***

#### **4.6. Peer Observations**

The department does not have a procedure for observing teaching in a formal way. The practice has been to discuss the problems faced in teaching among themselves in an informal way. However, as a result of the Staff Development Program conducted in the university the junior academics have become aware of the significance of peer observation. Although this will have a positive effect on teaching in the future the peer observation is not practiced sufficiently at present.

At the same time examination papers are moderated by others, from the department itself or from another relevant department and answer scripts are examined by second examiners.

***The review team is of the view that the practice of peer observation is UNSATISFACTORY.***

#### 4.7. Skills Development

The department has adopted sufficient measures to develop subject-specific and generic skills of its students. It has introduced a good degree program in demography and helps students develop their subject-specific skills further through field surveys and internships..

The students are to be supervised and trained to conduct independent research studies. It would help students to acquire skills not only in research methodology but also skills in writing and presentation.

***The review team is of the view that the aspect of skills development as contained in the syllabus seemed to be SATISFACTORY.***

#### 4.8. Academic Guidance and Counseling

The university has a team of counsellors comprising a Senior Counsellor and five junior counsellors. During the orientation program, the new-comers are guided in various aspects of university life by the Senior Counsellor. Also, the new students are assigned to a team of academic advisors for academic counseling. The personal tutor system is also in operation with a view to guiding the students in academic and personal matters.

Apart from these measures adopted at the university level, there are no academic counsellors at the departmental level. However, at any time students can approach members of the academic staff for help.

***The review team is of the in the opinion of this aspect could be rated as SATISFACTORY.***

### 5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the observations made during the visit by the review team, the eight aspects were judged as follows:

Aspect Reviewed	Judgment Given
Curriculum Design, Content and Review	Good
Teaching, Learning and Assessment Methods	Good
Quality of Students including Student Progress and Achievements	Good
Extent and Use of Student feedback	Satisfactory
Postgraduate Studies	Unsatisfactory
Peer Observation	Unsatisfactory
Skills Development	Satisfactory
Academic Guidance and Counseling	Satisfactory

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the Self-evaluation report and the findings during the visit of the review team following recommendations could be made:

- It is suggested to prepare a Departmental handbook for the benefit of the students
- A Course Coordinator/Academic Counselor must be appointed
- Revive the Postgraduate Diploma program
- Revive the MA and M Phil program
- Introduce a Certificate program in Demography to cater to the Provincial and local government administrators
- Arrange separate classes for students following the Special degree program in Demography as much as possible
- Library should be made more accessible and user-friendly
- explore the possibility of implementing a formal and effective mechanism for peer observation
- .Improve the teaching methodologies by using more and more modern equipment like multimedia projectors
- Implement a formal student feed back system
- Attention must be paid to make curriculum revision at regular intervals.

## **7. ANNEXES**

### **Annex 1. PERSONS MET**

Prof. W.I. De Silva - Dean, Faculty of Arts  
Mr. P. Amarabandu - Head, Department of Demography  
Members of the Academic Staff of Department of Demography  
Academic Support Staff of department of Demography

### **Annex 2. LIST OF TEACHING SESSIONS OBSERVED**

Day 2: First Year lecture at the New Arts Theatre  
Day 2 : Social Research Methods (Third Year)  
Day 2: Population Policies and Programs (Third Year)  
Day 3: Advanced Demographic Analysis (Fourth Year)

### **Annex 3. FACILITIES OBSERVED**

Lecture Theatres and Rooms  
Staff Rooms  
Office of the Department  
Departmental Library  
Computer Facilities available  
Facilities available for Academic Support Staff

### **Annex 4. List of Documents observed**

Publications by Academic Staff  
Minutes of Department Meetings  
Time Tables  
Curriculum and syllabi  
Handouts given to students  
Question papers  
Student dissertations  
List of PG Diploma dissertations