

Vice Chancellor's Report

XXVIII Annual Convocation - 27th September 2020

Hon'ble Chief Guest Professor Niraja Jayal,

Hon'ble Chief Justice of India and Chancellor of the University, Shri Sharad Arvind Bobde,

Hon'ble Judges of the Supreme Court of India,

Hon'ble Chief Justices and the Judges of the High Courts,

Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister and Minister of Higher Education, Shri C N Ashwath Narayan

Hon'ble Minister for Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Legislation, Shri J C Madhuswamy

Hon'ble Chairman of the Bar Council of India, Shri Manan Kumar Mishra

Hon'ble Members of the General Council, Executive Council, Academic Council and the Finance Committee of the University

Dear Students, Parents, Faculty and Staff

Good morning and welcome to the 28th Annual Convocation of the National Law School of India University. This Convocation is, in some ways, unique and unlike any other conducted by the University in the last three decades. The Coronavirus pandemic has ushered in the age of virtual Convocations and physical distancing, but it does not diminish the pride with which we present the graduating students from our various academic programmes. This year we graduate 3 PhD students,

40 Masters in Public Policy

45 Masters in Law

77 Bachelor of Arts and Laws (Honours)

411 students with Masters of Business Law and other postgraduate diploma off-campus programmes

Let me first wish all of our students the very best as they take a big personal step towards their life goals. We trust that your time at the Law School has given you the platform to pursue careers of distinction and we look forward to following your progress and celebrating your successes.

In this brief Report I will reflect on the recently completed academic year 2019-20 and conclude with a broad sketch of the challenges and opportunities for the years ahead.

1. The Coronavirus Pandemic

This Academic Year will be remembered as the year that the Coronavirus pandemic jolted the academic life of the University and swept away our best plans for everyday life at the University. In late March 2020, the University quickly emptied out of students and faculty as we prepared for the national and local lockdowns that followed. In these moments of crisis we draw inspiration from the values set by our founders and set ourselves two key objectives: First, to keep our students, faculty and staff safe from the risk of infections and Secondly, to ensure that we sustain our intensive academic calendar. We worked overtime to migrate rapidly to an online academic programme, innovated around our examination practice and ensured that we had a remarkable term with high levels of student attendance, exam taking and successful course completion.

It is due to the remarkable efforts of the faculty, staff and students that we've achieved these outstanding results and are here today to conduct our Annual Convocation on schedule this September.

We are now preparing for students to return to campus later this year and are working relentlessly to ensure that we adapt to the new pandemic adjusted normal. We are currently making infrastructural improvements and adopting improved health and safety practices for the ongoing Academic Year.

2. Academic Renewal and Expansion

In recent years there has been speculation that NLSIU may lose its status as India's No1 Law School. This year we've dispelled these suggestions and secured a No 1 Ranking on every non-commercial ranking study published. This includes the official NIRF, India Today, Outlook, The Week, Careers 360 and Education World among others. Significantly we've put more distance between ourselves and the rest of the Law Schools.

To ensure that we keep moving ahead, in the last Academic Year we've begun a long overdue expansion of student intake in our flagship BA LLB (Hons) programme from 80 to 120. This is the first expansion of the programme in 32 years. In the years ahead we hope to further increase student intake in existing programmes and launch new academic programmes in law and beyond.

The University adopted new Academic and Examination Regulations for three major academic programmes after a 11 year period. Moreover, the University has begun once again, after a decade long gap, to apply these Regulations to guide and shape the academic life of students. While improved Regulations will help redevelop the academic culture of the institution, we've built and deployed an online learning management system that ensures structured and reviewed syllabi for every course and the easy availability of reading materials. Moreover, examination papers are internally reviewed and plagiarism rules strictly applied. We've streamlined academic calendars to ensure that we conduct classes in a five day week leaving clear time slots for student and faculty activities. This decluttering of the academic calendar has helped ensure that the teaching schedule is focused and uninterrupted.

After a long period of 10 years we have recruited new faculty to the University. These exceptionally well qualified and motivated young faculty will further strengthen the University's teaching and research initiatives. In the year ahead we will add to our faculty strength and make recruitments to key administrative positions that are crucial for the University's future.

3. A Research Boost

NLSIU was established to deliver world class taught degrees and to generate original contributions to legal knowledge and policy in India and beyond. The University has several

vibrant Research Centres and Chair Professorships in various fields. In the year ahead we will put in fresh efforts to recruit academics to vacant Chair Professor positions.

Further, we have in the last year, incubated three fully funded multi-year research projects in the fields of Labour Law Reform, Regulatory Governance and Law and Social Transformation. We are currently developing projects in the fields of access to justice for under-trials and the ethics of artificial intelligence and new technologies. Despite the Covid constraints we aim to establish a stronger research and policy engagement platform at the University by the end of 2020.

Last year I had promised to find a suitable way to honour and remember our Founder, Dr Madhava Menon. In September 2020, the University announced the Dr NR Madhava Menon Doctoral Fellowship Programme. This fellowship will fully support 3 doctoral students for a 3 year period. The initial cohort will be supported by the General Electric Company and we look forward to supporting bigger cohorts through this Fellowship programme in the years ahead.

NLSIU must attract the most talented young scholars and faculty to work at the University. We have taken preliminary steps in this direction and are humbled by strong early response. If we succeed in gathering a critical number of scholars to the University, then NLSIU will re-emerge on the national and international stage as the

4. Ecological and Financial Sustainability

In the last year the University has decisively moved away from two practices that threaten its long term sustainability. First, we've reversed the budget deficits of recent years and are hereafter committed not to promise more than we can deliver. We are building long term strategies for alumni fundraising and engaging with philanthropic foundations and the government to support our future promise and growth.

Secondly, the University has embraced core principles of ecological sustainability. We've successfully reduced electricity and water consumption by a third and fuel use by half. We've begun implementing rain water harvesting measures and are planning to install water recycling plants. We're actively exploring alternative energy sources, especially solar power. With some external capital support we will implement these projects at the earliest.

Any University will be successful in its pedagogy when it practices its values. Our current efforts to ensure ecological and financial sustainability instruct the University community about the values we stand for. We are confident that students educated in these University practices will carry these values and practices into the wider world.

5. Mapping the next steps

I'd like to conclude on a personal note. A year ago, I received a call from the Office of our Chancellor, the Chief Justice of India Shri Sharad Arvind Bobde, to travel to New Delhi to meet regarding the role of the Vice Chancellor of this University. In that meeting I came to witness and recognize the unwavering commitment and dedication of the Chancellor to ensuring that our University remains a national and international leader in legal education. In the year past, I have consistently received the encouragement and advice of the Chancellor and remain sincerely grateful for this support.

The National Law School of India University, Bangalore was established through a unique collaboration between the Bar Council of India, the Government of Karnataka, the Honourable Judges of the Supreme Court of India and various High Courts and legal academics. The remarkable success of the University has been built by this remarkable coalition. The continued success of this University will call on all our stakeholders to sustain and build this coalition with other well wishers to guarantee that NLSIU remains a national treasure accessible to future generations of students for decades to come.

The recently released New Education Policy 2020 sketches four imperatives for NLSIU, and other similarly placed Universities. First, that single stream Universities must grow into vibrant multidisciplinary institutions or form multidisciplinary institutional clusters. Second, that we avoid a narrow vocational approach to professional education and to embrace a holistic and multidisciplinary approach grounded in constitutional values. Thirdly, to build a vibrant and open culture of knowledge creation grounded in high quality empirical and theoretical research. Fourthly, to ensure greater inclusivity by securing public and private financial support to

moderate fees and to improve access to disadvantaged groups and then support their educational achievement.

This University is enthusiastic and ready to embrace all these imperatives set out in NEP 2020. With the support and collaboration of our stakeholders we will work hard to emerge as a Model University that exemplifies the goals and aspirations set out above. We will need the support and wise counsel of many among you to reach these ambitious goals. We invite you to join and collaborate with us on this path.

Prof (Dr.) Sudhir Krishnaswamy

Vice-Chancellor

Conclusion