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# UGC-Infonet: E-Journals Consortium and Indian Academics: The Right Initiative at the Right Time

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## Introduction

UGC-Infonet E-Journals consortium initiative was undertaken by the Indian University Grants Commission (UGC) to facilitate free access to scholarly journals and databases in all fields and disciplines by the research and academic community across the country. All universities who are under the purview of UGC have been provided UGC-infonet Connectivity and access to scholarly e-Journals and Databases. More than 2,000 scholarly journals and databases were made available during 2004 and this number has increased to more than 4,500 full text e-journals since January 2005. As of May 2006, 122 universities are accessing resources from the programme. The access is based on IP range. This effort has had a noticeable impact on the research and academic community.

## User Awareness Programmes

Awareness is the key to the best use of scholarly literature. All faculty, research scholars, students, and library professionals had to be made aware of the benefits of this programme. INFLIBNET, which is a library and information gateway for the scholarly community of India, has conducted five two-day national seminars with the following objectives.

- To inform the users about the UGC-Infonet initiatives
- To educate them about a number of features of the initiative

- To spread awareness about the UGC-Infonet e-journals consortium and its resources
- To gather information about additional resources required to meet user expectations
- To serve and strengthen the higher education system of our country through a more effective, efficient, and systematic approach.
- To provide a platform to discuss the important issues of the UGC-Infonet e-journal consortium at a national level

### **Participants**

The seminar attracted a large number of faculty and research students and professionals from library and information science. The seminar provided a unique opportunity to learn more about access to scholarly journals and databases that were not available few years ago. Presentations by different publishers and experts were arranged at all the programme venues, to inform participants about features like article alerts, table of contents alerts, etc. These seminars were conducted at different universities in different regions of the country. The venues were the M S University of Baroda, Vadodara; Goa University, Goa; Bangalore University, Bangalore; Jadavpur University, Kolkatta; and University of Delhi, Delhi.

### **Analysis of Feedback**

INFLIBNET used a questionnaire to measure the usefulness of the seminar and the level of understanding about the initiative, as well as identifying user needs.

### **Number of Participants and Questionnaire Responses**

Delhi had the most responses, with 28% of participants. Vadodara and Goa had 22% each, while Kolkata had 13%, and Bangalore had 11% only.

### **Universities Participating**

Venues for the seminars were selected for the convenience of users. There were participants from 78 universities. The Delhi seminar was attended by 36% of the universities, while Bangalore and Kolkata had 20% and 17% respectively. Vadodara had participation from 15% of the universities with Goa attended by 12%.

### **Awareness of the Programme**

The participants were asked whether had been aware of the UGC-Infonet initiative. If they had been aware, what was the main source of their knowledge? 43% of the participants came to know about the programme

through INFLIBNET and 31% said their librarians had informed them. 14% of the participants responded 'other source,' while 7% learned of the programme through UGC.

### **Access to Internet in the Universities or Departments**

Participants were asked about Internet access in their universities or departments, to determine whether they were aware of Internet access provided through UGC-Infonet to their universities or departments. 82% of the participants have Internet connections at their universities and 17% replied "no," which shows a lack of awareness, since the participants were from member universities who have access to e-resources through the UGC-Infonet: E-Journals Consortium.

### **Internet Access through the UGC-Infonet Programme**

Another part of previous question was whether Internet access is provided by UGC-Infonet or other agency. Many participants were not aware of the UGC-Infonet connectivity in their university. Only 40% Yes; 34% said No, and 11% selected Other, while 15% did not reply. This shows that more programmes must be conducted to raise awareness of the UGC-Infonet.

### **Location of Internet Access**

Most of the participants use their departments and libraries to access the Internet. 47% of the participants use the Internet at their departments, and 33% use the library. 7% have Internet access at home and 9% use a cybercafe or lab. Only 1% of the participants are frequent users who get access at all options.

### **Reasons for Using the Internet**

49% of the are using aspects of the Internet that were mentioned in the survey question. 22% use e-mail only, and 12% use e-journals. Some repondents use different combinations of e-mail and browsing, e-mail and databases, e-mail and e-journals, and so on.

### **Does Your Library Have All the Journals You Would Like?**

86% (308 participants) persons responded No. This figure shows the crucial need that academics have for information. Only 14% of the participants are satisfied with their libraries.

### **Frequency of Article Reading**

Most participants read articles daily or weekly. 24% participants read articles daily, while 40% read an article each week, with 16% reading an article in a month, and 18% of the participants reading them occasionally. Current informatino is essential for students, teachers, and researchers. The UGC-infonet Consortium, by subscribing to and providing e-resources, will help improve the reading habits of academics.

### **Use of UGC-Infonet: E-Journals by Universities**

57% responded "no," when asked if they had used e-journals provided by UGC-Infonet. This shows the lack of awareness by users, or the lack of instruction provided by INFLIBNET and librarians.

### **Difficulties in Accessing E-Journals**

Participants were asked about the difficulties they face getting access to e-journals. 24% have some problems, while 18% have no problems. 30% have problem with access speed (i.e. bandwidth).

The minimum bandwidth of 64 Kbps has already been increased to 256 Kpbs. Universities are monitoring bandwidth use, and it will be steadily increased.

### **Charging for E-journal Access**

The participants were asked whether, since the entire service is offered free to universities, they agreed that universities should be charged to get access to many more resources. 40% of the respondents favor a nominal access charge. 54% are not in favour of any fee.

### **Best Features of E-journals**

Searching is the best feature for most participants. E-mail alerts and browsing were also chosen by many participants. Around 50% liked search options, while 18% preferred the e-mail alert option. Some respondents mentioned multiple options.

### **Observations**

Host universities get the major benefit from national seminars, although they provide opportunities for others from nearby places to attend. Some faculty and research scholars, however, may not attend due to lack of time and the travel requirement. Many universities do not support attending such programs and the participants must pay their own expenses. The following observations are made about these programmes.

1. INFLIBNET is making a great effort to raise awareness of the UGC-Infonet initiative, but there is still a great need to do more to publicize this ambitious programme.
2. Librarians must be more active in this initiative by making a greater effort to increase information literacy.
3. Participants did not have much access to journal articles and it is hoped that this will increase tremendously over a period of time with routine exposure to e-resources.
4. Access speed and other difficulties need to be addressed appropriately by higher authorities in consultation with ERNET.
5. Most of the participants have not used e-contents that are subscribed to by UGC-Infonet Consortium.
6. Keyword searching is a more common searching practice than browsing.
7. More and more resources must be made available under the program.

### Recommendations

The UGC-Infonet National Seminars conducted by INFLIBNET were well received by a large number of participants from all over the country. Seminar participants expressed appreciation for the vision of UGC and the support provided by INFLIBNET for research and academic work. The effort of the National Negotiation Committee is appreciated in selecting the publications.

1. User awareness programs of one to two days duration at all the universities will be organized immediately, wherever access is provided through UGC-Infonet.
2. Agencies such as INFLIBNET should inform universities about the policies and actions of the programme by providing a printed copy of the reference guides, the brochures, and poster to all universities and departments time to time.
3. The National Negotiation Committee (which is responsible for subscriptions to e-resources) should put more effort into covering information from all fields and disciplines.
4. INFLIBNET should plan workshops for the faculty and research scholars.
5. Use statistics are a vital part of evaluating the usefulness of any product; therefore, use statistics for each university will be distributed periodically.

### Acknowledgment

This work is a tribute to late Dr. V S Cholin, Scientist - B, INFLIBNET Centre Ahmedabad, who conceived the idea of conducting user awareness programmes at the national level to make people aware about the UGC-Infonet Consortium. He also coordinated these programmes. His untimely demise has created a vacuum which can never be filled.

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## Website

INFLIBNET Centre, Ahmedabad, <http://www.inflibnet.ac.in>