REPORT

ON
4 DAYS STUDY TOUR OF STUDENT SERVICES DEPARTMENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

"Learning Across Frontiers"

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Annexure:- Recommendations Part of PIDE Report (September 2022) produced under
HESSA Project on Improvement of Student Services at Pakistani HEIs

1. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I feel grateful to the leadership of Karakoram International University (KIU), the Vice Chancellor, Engr. Prof. Dr. Attaullah Shah who nominated me for this study tour. I am highly indebted to USAID-HESSA Project team in Pakistan for providing me this unique opportunity to Visit University of Utah USA and Student Affairs leader, Vice president Student Affairs - Lori Mcdonald and her team at University of Utah specially Dr. Randy Mc Crillis – Dean Student Affairs and Amy Kimball Engar who made our visit truly meaningful. Both led our team to every office and scheduled meetings, sessions and presentations that were relevant to the purpose of our visit to University of Utah. Both not only made our tour professionally purposeful but also made our stay safe and comfortable as long as our team was at University of Utah. I feel whole-heartedly grateful for all the support from all.

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Director Student Development & External Linkages, KIU. GB
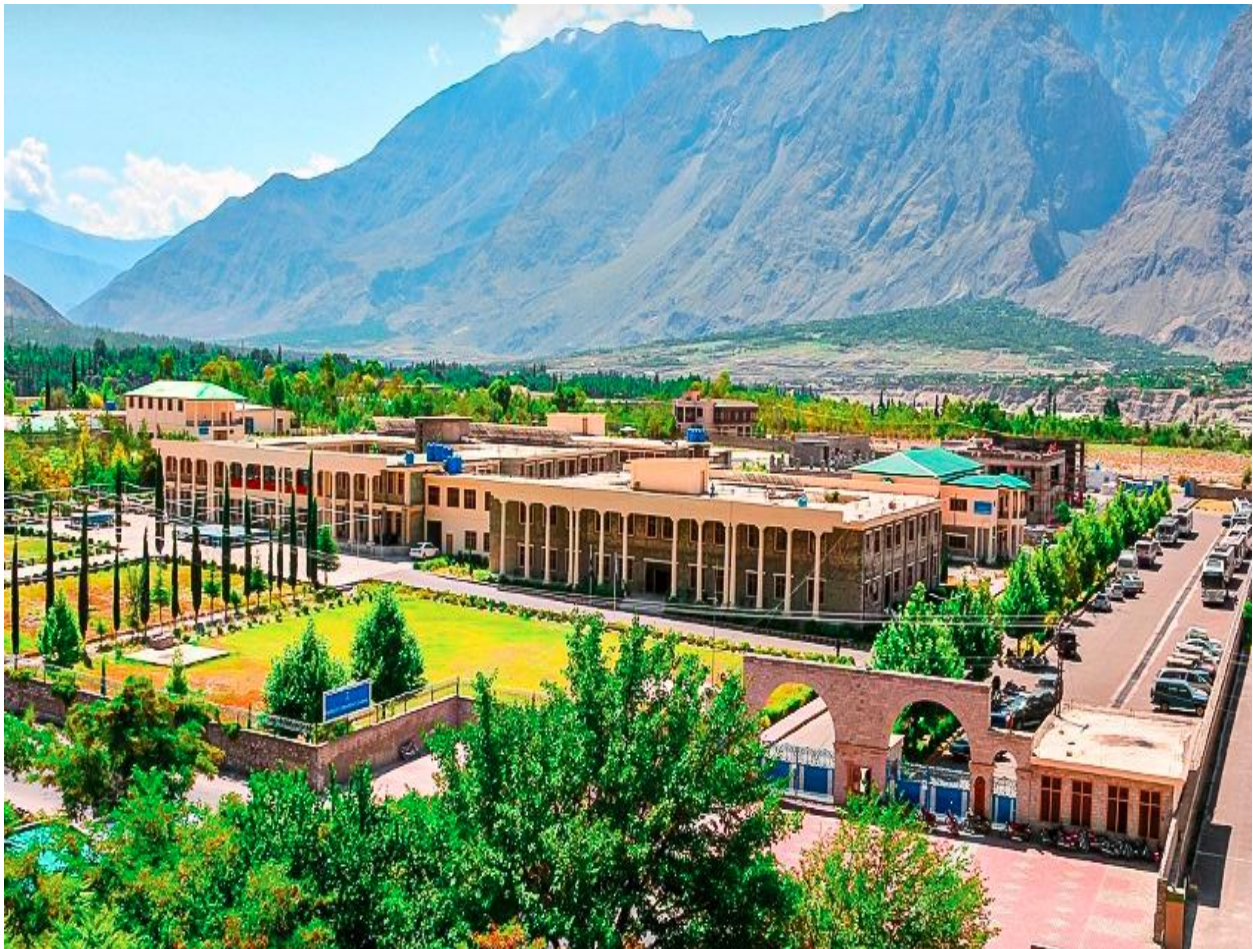
2. BACKGROUND

USAID's Higher Education System Strengthening Activity (HESSA) is a 5-year partnership between the government of Pakistan and the United States. It includes partnerships with 16 Pakistani universities. HESSA project is being Implemented by the University of Utah in collaboration with HEC, and the project focuses on enhancing graduate employability. (Source:- 01)

Amongst a number of themes under which HESSA is collaborating with Partner Universities in Pakistan is Improving students' services at national Universities of Pakistan.

Under the auspice of HESSA project's theme of improving students' services at Universities, I was graciously nominated by the Leadership of KIU for a four days' study tour of University of UTAH through HESSA project. A team of 14 student affairs officers representing different Pakistani Universities visited University of Utah in the second week of May 2023.

In this report an endeavor has been made to capture the observations made during this visit and draw some transferable skills and recommendations, keeping the historical, cultural, social and academic similarities and dis-similarities in view. It is hoped that these recommendations would be useful in improving students' services at Karakoram International University (KIU) henceforth in the days to come.

3. INTRODUCTION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH, USA

Nestled in the picturesque foothills of the Rocky Mountains, the University of Utah stands as a beacon of academic excellence and innovation in the United States. Founded in 1850, it is the state's flagship institution of higher learning and has grown to become one of the country's premier public research universities. With a rich history of transformative education, cutting-edge research, and a vibrant campus culture, the University of Utah continues to inspire and empower generations of students to reach new heights of intellectual, personal, and professional achievement.

Located in the vibrant city of Salt Lake City, Utah, the university's striking campus spans over 1,500 acres, providing an inspiring backdrop for the pursuit of knowledge and discovery. As an institution deeply committed to student success and engagement, the University of Utah offers a diverse range of academic programs across various disciplines, catering to the interests and aspirations of a global community of learners.

Recognized for its groundbreaking research endeavors, the University of Utah is at the forefront of transformative discoveries that impact both local communities and the broader world. With state-of-the-art research facilities and a dynamic faculty of distinguished scholars, students have the unique opportunity to participate in cutting-edge research projects that address some of society's most pressing challenges.

Beyond academics and research, the University of Utah prides itself on its vibrant campus life and strong sense of community. A multitude of student-led organizations, clubs, and athletic teams provide an enriching extracurricular experience, fostering personal growth, leadership development, and lifelong friendships.

Committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse environment, the University of Utah embraces individuals from all walks of life, fostering a community of mutual respect and understanding. This dedication to diversity and inclusion enriches the

educational experience, exposing students to a broad range of perspectives and preparing them to thrive in an interconnected world.

Whether exploring the breathtaking natural wonders surrounding the campus or engaging in rigorous intellectual pursuits, students at the University of Utah are empowered to become critical thinkers, compassionate leaders, and catalysts for positive change.

In conclusion, the University of Utah is a dynamic institution that seamlessly combines a storied legacy with a forward-thinking vision. With a steadfast commitment to academic excellence, research prowess, and student well-being, it continues to be a sought-after destination for aspiring scholars, researchers, and visionaries from around the globe. (Source:- 02)
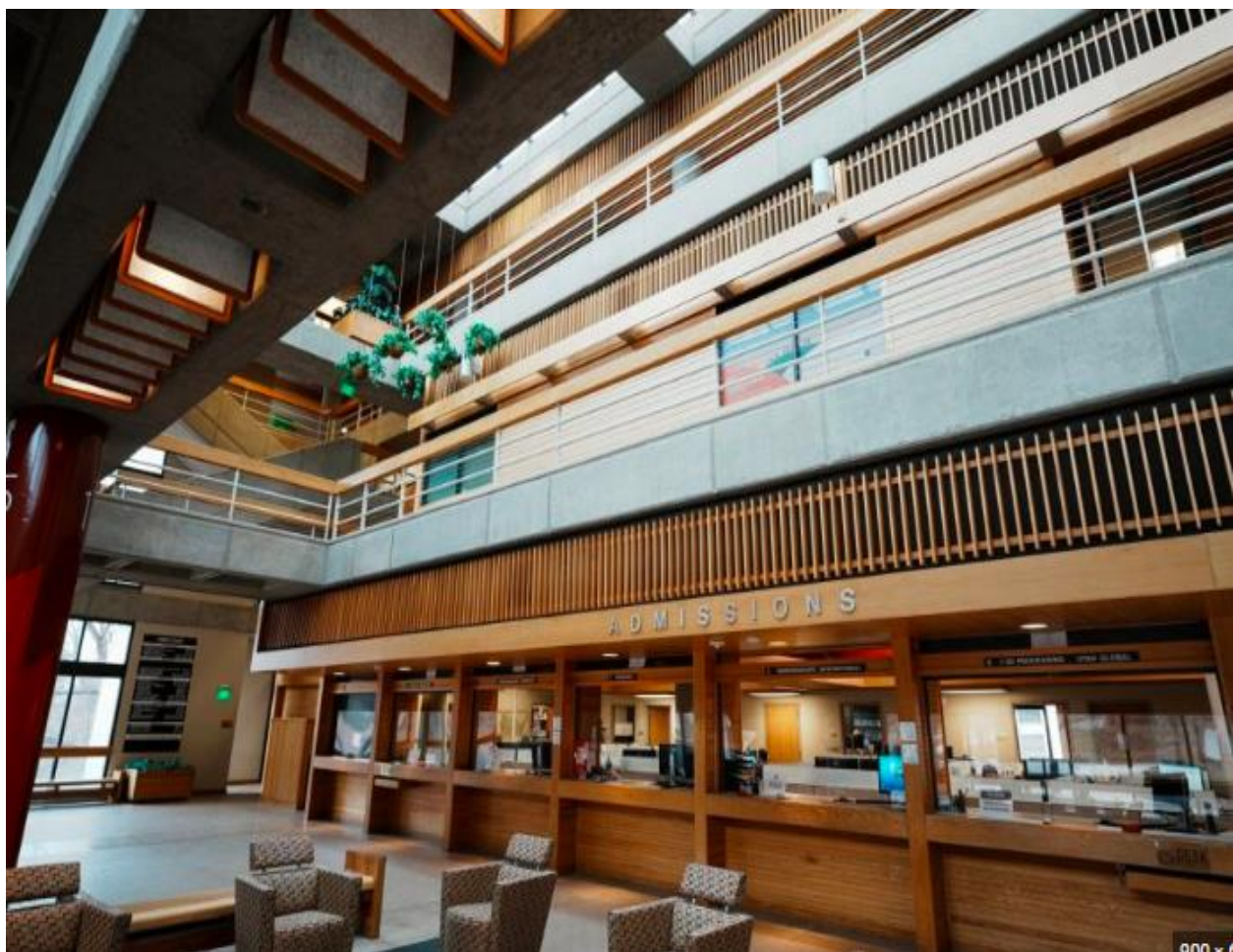
4. The University of Utah at a Glance

Overview

- Established in year 1850.
- Flagship University of Utah State.
- Offers 85 Graduate Programs and 104 Undergrad programs
- 18 Schools with 96 teaching departments
- Teaching cum Research University
- Current Students Body, around 35000
- Teacher student Ratio 18:1
- Total Full time teaching staff 2568

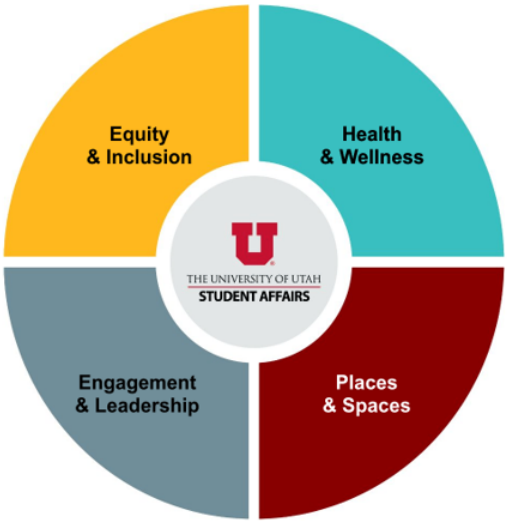University of Utah Student Life Center

Visit

5. Facilities and Venues Visited the Directorate of Students Affairs at University of Utah

Delegation from Pakistan made a guided visit of different facilities, venues and offices of Student Affairs. It was observed that Directorate of Student Affairs works under four core thematic areas namely Health and Wellness, Equity and inclusion, Engagement and Leadership and places and spaces.

Under these four core thematic areas different sub categories are functioning with proper offices and trained staff members. It was surprising to know that almost 400 full-time dedicated professional are engaged at Directorate of student services to work around the clock to ensure best possible services to the students of University of Utah(Source:- Dr. Randy Mc Crillis- Dean Student Affairs, University of Utah). Here is some description about the functions of three to four venues that the delegates visited. Then follows reflections from the activities of the venues visited.

Directorate of Student Affairs

Comprised of more than 20 Departments, Student Affairs encourages U students to participate in the creation of their own campus culture, collaboratively working alongside professional staff, student leaders, and academic partners to ensure all members of our community not only feel welcomed but are fully incorporated into university life.

5.1 Health & Wellness

Under the theme of Health and Wellness the delegate visited University Counselling Center and Center for students' wellness. Its was found that the University Counseling Center (UCC) offers opportunities for personal development that will lead to enhanced learning and contribution to the University. The Center helps students resolve existing problems, prevent potential problems, and develop new skills that can enrich their lives. Services address personal, career, and academic learning issues. Formats include individual and group counseling, classes, and workshops. Consultation and outreach services are also available to university organizations, departments, and staff.

The UCC offers psychiatric medication services, including psychiatric evaluations and medication management, for individuals who are engaged in regular ongoing therapy or counseling at the UCC. This Center also offers mindfulness therapies and exercise to the students and staff. (Source:- 02)

5.2 Equity & Inclusion

Under this theme delegate from Pakistan visited Women Resource Center and met the team of professionals and found out more about its activities talked over transferable skills.

The delegate was briefed that the Women's Resource Center at the University of Utah was founded in 1971 by a group of visionary women faculty, staff and graduate students. During the 1970's and 80's the Center was at the forefront of many changes on and off campus:

Helped found the Women's Studies Program in 1975 (later named Gender Studies) Founded a training program in feminist-multicultural counseling in 1994. The Center also advocated for campus child care. It also monitored the general campus climate for women. The Center also extended support for the hiring of women faculty and staff This center also established scholarship programs for single-parent, non-traditional aged and first-generation students

The Center played a role statewide and nationally helping to found: The Consortium for Utah Women in Higher Education; The Utah Math Science Network; The National Women's Studies Association. (Source:- 02)

Today, the WRC continues its tradition of leadership on women's issues. This Center is engaged in social justice work to help end racism, sexism, homophobia and all other biases that may lead to violence, intimidation and threat on our campus. This center also works extensively to support student victim-survivors of interpersonal violence.

5.3 Engagement & Leadership

Our delegation was led to venues and facilitation centers of Student Leadership & involvement where it was a great opportunity to meet greet and listen and learn from team of relevant professionals who were involved in the activities of students engagement in creative activities. It was found that these venues continuously strive to involve and engage the students in the activities that are meant to motivate the students to participate in the activities of social skills development. The centers organize socialization days to help students get involve, get to know each other, find out more common interests and work on the projects of common interests.

Engagement & Leadership

Students develop leadership and transferable skills necessary to become civically engaged, productive members of our society.

- Student Leadership & Involvement
- Bennion Community Engagement Center
- Fraternity and Sorority Life

5.4 Places & Spaces

Places and spaces have special role in in the processes of students' development at Student Services at University of Utah. State of the art sports complex, climbing wall, spacious gymnasiums, swimming pools and many more add to the glory of University of Utah.

Amongst all students Union building stands out in terms of its importance to students. Every student is member of students union.

The A. Ray Olpin Union is the community center of campus that complements the academic mission of the University. The Union cultivates an environment that serves students by providing social, cultural, leadership and co-curricular opportunities. The Union values diversity and promotes a safe and welcoming atmosphere where students are inspired to realize their potential.

It's the place where new friends meet. Where students learn to lead. Where parties and events draw thousands. Where lunch and a study break fit between classes. It's the place where academic and local communities come together at the University of Utah.

The Union is the community center of the college, serving students, faculty, staff, alumni, and guests. By whatever form or name, a college union is an organization offering a variety of programs, activities, services, and facilities that, when taken together, represent a well-considered plan for the community life of the college.

6 IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS & RECMENDATIONS FOR KIU

This visit provided an eye-opening opportunity for members of delegation visiting from Pakistan who were on three to four days study tour of University of Utah to see and get a flavor of student services facilities, venues, process and resources including human resource working under the umbrella of student affairs. This visit provided opportunity to brainstorm with the teams of professional working in the different areas of student services. Resultantly following practices were observed and that reproduced in terms of possible recommendation for KIU, Gilgit.

6.1 Student Feedback for Continuous Improvement:

At the University of Utah, student feedback is seen as a valuable resource for continuous improvement. They employ various methods, including surveys, focus groups, and open forums, to gather input from students. This proactive approach allows the university to identify areas of improvement, understand student needs, and address any concerns promptly.

Students being the most important stake-holder of the University, KIU can implement a similar feedback system, ensuring that students' opinions and experiences are heard, valued, and utilized to enhance the overall learning environment. Director Students Affairs Office can anchor this facility for students.

6.2. Encouraging Creativity and Expression:

The University of Utah recognizes the importance of fostering a creative and expressive campus culture. They organize open houses, art exhibitions, performances, and workshops where students can showcase their talents and ideas. This not only

provides a platform for students to express themselves but also nurtures a vibrant and supportive community that celebrates creativity.

KIU can adopt a similar approach by organizing regular events and providing spaces for students to engage in various creative pursuits, encouraging them to explore their passions and interests beyond their academic studies.

6.3. Inclusive Student Union Membership:

Having a single Student Union that automatically includes all students ensures representation and inclusivity. The University of Utah's Student Union serves as a unified voice for students, advocating for their needs and rights.

KIU can follow this model, ensuring that every student is a member of the central Students Union, promoting a sense of belonging and providing a collective platform for students to voice their concerns and ideas.

6.4. Active Participation in Clubs and Societies:

The University of Utah places emphasis on involving every student in at least one club or society. This approach promotes student engagement and offers diverse opportunities for personal and academic growth.

By encouraging all students at KIU to join clubs aligned with their interests, such as academic, cultural, sports, or hobby-based clubs, the university can provide avenues for students to connect with like-minded peers and enhance their overall university experience.

6.5. Nurturing Student-Initiated Societies:

The University of Utah supports student-led initiatives by encouraging them to create societies or clubs based on their passions and interests. This approach empowers students to take ownership of their extracurricular activities and fosters leadership skills.

KIU can plan to dispense available resources, mentorship, and administrative support to help students establish and sustain such student-led societies, promoting a culture of initiative and innovation.

6.6. Orientation and Socialization:

The University of Utah's socialization day plays a pivotal role in integrating new students into the university community. It helps them navigate the campus, build social connections, and feel a sense of belonging.

KIU needs to organize a comprehensive orientation program that includes campus tours, interactive sessions, and team-building activities to help incoming students adapt to the new environment and form strong bonds with their peers. The first day and first week is very important in the life cycle of a University student.

6.7. Prioritizing Student Well-Being:

By establishing offices with well-trained counselors and career guides, the University of Utah ensures that students have access to professional support for their mental health and career development. These dedicated offices offer guidance on academic challenges, personal issues, and career planning.

KIU direly needs set up similar well-being centers with certified counselors and career advisors, providing a safe and confidential space for students to seek assistance and support throughout their academic journey.

6.8. Engaging Alumni:

The University of Utah maintains strong connections with its alumni through dedicated offices for Alumni Affairs management. Engaging alumni allows the university to tap into a valuable network of experienced professionals who can provide mentorship, job opportunities, and insights into industry trends.

At KIU there is need to establish proper Alumni Office to develop a structured alumni engagement program to foster enduring relationships between graduates and current students, providing valuable resources for career development and networking.

6.9. Internship Opportunities:

The University of Utah offers paid internships within its departments and teaching sections, giving students practical experience and exposure to real-world scenarios. These internships allow students to apply their classroom knowledge, develop professional skills, and build their resumes.

KIU Pakistan can further strengthen collaboration with local businesses, organizations, and industries to create a range of internship opportunities for its students, ensuring they gain relevant experience and a competitive edge in the job market. KIU management can also think about engaging its fresh graduates as interns in its different sections for three to six months so that graduates will enter the market with at least basic necessary contemporary office skills.

6.10. Fostering a Green Campus:

At the University of Utah, students actively participate in green campus initiatives, contributing to sustainability efforts and environmental consciousness.

KIU need to come up with more clubs and societies in addition to KIU Green Campus society to involve students in various eco-friendly projects, such as recycling programs, energy conservation campaigns, and community outreach for

environmental awareness. This not only promotes environmental responsibility but also instills a sense of civic duty and global citizenship among students.

6.11. State-of-the-Art Student Services:

Investing in modern, well-equipped buildings and offices for student services demonstrates a commitment to providing a high standard of support and assistance to students. At the University of Utah, such facilities offer comfortable and conducive spaces for students to access various services conveniently.

U Faculty and Dignitaries Dedicate New Student Life Center | KUER   Visit

KIU needs to prioritize upgrading its student service facilities to create an inclusive and welcoming environment that fosters academic and personal growth.

6.12. Close coordination among administration, staff and Students:

The University of Utah's emphasis on promoting a collaborative work environment among faculty, staff, and administrators enhances the overall learning experience

for students. Interdisciplinary projects and teamwork contribute to a holistic educational approach, where students can benefit from a diverse range of perspectives and expertise. At KIU, there is need to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing among its academic and administrative teams, leading to innovative solutions and enriched educational practices.

6.13 Establishment of Women Development Center

As mentioned above, the University of Utah has a dedicated women resource center situated on the campus. This center has marvelous interventions in helping out women in terms providing scholarships, advice, ensuring fair opportunities in employment, admissions and many other areas.

KIU can also think on similar lines to ensure more participation of women folk in higher education specially for the one coming from marginalized backgrounds.

6.14. Proper Facilitation and Team Building

It is observed that University of Utah, authorities have not only invested in academic affairs of the University but also have left no stone un turned to ensure proper facilities, offices, resources including dedicated qualified full-time staff members to dispense students' services in its true letter and spirit. As mentioned earlier that there are 400 fully trained and qualified staff members who are working under the umbrella of Student Affairs Offices. It is not the abundance of resources that made University of Utah to deploy such a big number of staff, but the nation-wide research based educated opinions and findings coming from the employers across the United States that employers preferred University graduates who possessed more interpersonal soft and hard skills than those of carrying mere good CGPAs.

Pakistani Universities including KIU also needs to work around on this paradigm that interpersonal soft and hard contemporary skills are equally important to good academic credentials of a graduate to make him or her global graduate. Once understood and agreed to this philosophy then KIU need to divert/invest resources towards strengthening student services at the University in more meaningful way.

Proper dedicated full-time staffing is indispensable to make the students services areas functional.

Here it is pertinent to refer to the policy recommendations given in the report on improving student services at Pakistani Universities produced by **Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)** under HESSA Project (Published in September 2022), where in its policy recommendation it strongly endorses proper dedicated team building for student services and discourages adhocism and treating and assigning student services themes as additional duties and charges. (Policy recommendations part is attached as annexure to peruse along with this report)

6.15. Resource Generation.

In addition to the traditional sources of funding from Government, generosity from local community, business families and ombudsmen and alumni of the University is a visible contributing factor in resource generation for the University of Utah.

For example, David Eccles School of Business, Eccles Health Sciences Building and Eccles student services building shows that David Eccles a respectable industrialist who donated so many buildings for the University. There are many more such success stories.

KIU can also approach such industrialist and reputed business families for within Pakistan for financial assistance and contribution in terms of infrastructure. No doubt Pakistan is also full of great businessmen and industrialists, big families and philanthropists who would take pride in supporting an academic institution like KIU.

7. Conclusion

Incorporating these detailed lessons drawn from the University of Utah's student-centered approaches, KIU can create a thriving and supportive learning community that prioritizes student well-being, personal development, and academic excellence. By adapting and implementing these strategies, KIU can nurture a dynamic, inclusive, and innovative environment that empowers students to succeed in their educational pursuits and beyond.

MOVING FORWARD: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Student Affairs Services Needs
Assessment of Selected Higher
Education Institutions of Pakistan

SECTION

4

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this report, PIDE has made key recommendations for moving the student support services sector forward at public HEIs in Pakistan. These key recommendations are based on research and feedback from a diverse range of stakeholders – students, faculty, administrative staff, employers, and the HEC. Based on the findings detailed in this assessment, PIDE recommendations the following actions:

Financial Aid

▸ Established Financial Aid Offices

Most of the HEI offices that handle financial aid lack full-time staff and clear financial aid policies that are separate from donor requirements. There should be an Office of Financial Aid with dedicated staff who are operationally well-versed and have training in fundraising. These offices should also strengthen financial aid mechanisms by devising policies that move beyond the minimal HEC requirements.

▸ Diversified Revenue Generation

The data on existing need-based scholarships reveals that universities largely lack their own funding for scholarships. There is an urgent need to revisit university business models and to identify opportunities for revenue generation. Key opportunities for revenue generation include:

- Fundraising strategies with private sector, particularly building CSR initiatives
- Engagement with alumni on a regular interval for fundraising
- For HEIs located in urban centers, explore allocating parcels of land to commercial activities for revenue generation.
- Establish self-sustaining endowment funds.

▸ Digital Platforms

Most of the HEIs utilize a manual system for administering scholarships and lack efficient digital forums and grievance redressal mechanisms. Application processes should be streamlined and easily accessed through digital platforms

▸ Student Communication Mechanisms

Students often are not aware of funding opportunities, deadlines, and other key information related to financial aid. HEI Financial Aid Offices should develop robust communication plans for announcing and disbursing aid and should create a review/appeals process and system.

▸ Eliminating Fund Disbursal Delays

Students often face delay in receiving scholarships, leaving them struggling to pay financial dues for the semester. HEIs must internally reexamine disbursement cash flows and work with sponsors so students are not placed in untenable situations due to external funding delays.
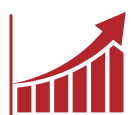
There is an urgent need to revisit university business models and to identify opportunities for revenue generation.

Career Readiness

▶ Established Career Services Offices

Most of the HEIs lack dedicated career placement offices and handle student career readiness interventions in an ad hoc manner. A dedicated career services office should be established at each HEI, and trained, full-time staff who are not performing dual responsibilities across the university are also required to effectively and efficiently run such centers. Services that these offices can provide include but are not limited to:

- Career counselling and aptitude testing
- Skills development- Resume/CV writing, mock interviews, LinkedIn profile building, digital platforms for job searching
- Internship placement
- Job placement
- Industry linkages
- Labor market surveys

▶ Undergraduate Course Policy & Certificate Programs

The current undergraduate program policy framework is quite rigid when examining opportunities to formally incorporate career readiness skills coursework in the curriculum. While that should be an area of policy reform focus for the HEC, HEIs should also consider employing non-graded, yet mandatory courses for undergraduates that focus on critical workforce skills. Additionally, such courses should not be offered at the end of their undergraduate degree, but through the duration of their program.

▶ Curriculum Reform & Advisory Committees

HEIs must establish mechanisms for regular course review to ensure that courses are keeping up with industry needs and standards. An advisory committee consisting of faculty, industry experts, and alumni should be set up to review and suggest course design changes annually. It is also recommended that deliberations be shared with the HEC so they can receive continual feedback for their policies on program requirements. Specific curriculum reforms that students and faculty alike have remarked upon include:

- Undergraduate level courses have a limited focus in developing interpersonal communication and other soft skills. While relevant technical skills are key, more emphasis should be placed on presentations and written assignments in regular courses.

- Students in technical fields particularly complained that they are being taught out-of-date software that is not meeting industry demands. For example, HEIs are still teaching C++ while industry is using STATA, SQL, and Python.

- The existing system primarily evaluates student performance through paper-based exams. However, to better prepare students for real-life scenarios and to build their critical thinking skills, exams and other evaluation methods should include case-studies and practical knowledge application.

▶ Digital Portals for Career Connections

Universities largely lack digital data portals that connect students to internship opportunities, jobs, industry representatives, and alumni. Case Management Systems (CMS) and Learning Management Systems (LMS) should be utilized to foster interactions with between these groups while also serving as a valuable database for HEIs.

HEIs must establish mechanisms for regular course review to ensure that courses are keeping up with industry needs and standards.

Student Entrepreneurship

▶ Mandatory Entrepreneurship Coursework

Undergraduate programs, particularly those outside of business schools, offer limited to no courses on entrepreneurship. As a result, students are not exposed to the entrepreneurial mindset, nor the technical skills needed to make business ideas a reality. Mandatory entrepreneurship courses are strongly recommended so that students of all academic backgrounds can explore ideas for self-employment while building valuable technical skills. Additional follow-on, optional courses are also recommended for interested students. As HEC policy can be rigid for undergraduate coursework, it is recommended that universities work to offer such courses within the current constraints and advocate for broader policy reform.

▶ Entrepreneurship Facilities

Where entrepreneurship activities are present at HEIs, most of the work is funneled through ORICs, whose mandate is more so focused on commercialization efforts. Therefore, it is recommended that HEIs create dedicated spaces and resources for microenterprise development (e.g., incubation centers) that are open to students of all disciplines and link students to business mentors and seed funding opportunities.

▶ Frameworks for Freelancing

Freelancing is an emerging job area for students, both during and after their studies, and is largely self-initiated. HEIs should capitalize on this trend and use it as a training opportunity to promote entrepreneurship on campuses. Additionally, this would give university staff the opportunity to provide guidance to students on how to pursue such activities to complement their coursework instead of comprising their academic performance.

▶ Promoting Women's Entrepreneurship

In many contexts across Pakistan, women face considerable constraints in pursuing formal labor market participation due to familial pressures. However, many entrepreneurial activities, particularly those online, can provide viable alternatives for income generation. Therefore, HEIs should prioritize providing specific entrepreneurship interventions for their female student body alongside more general entrepreneurship activities.

Student Leadership & Co-Curriculars

▶ Policy Reform for Student Societies

Mostly HEIs lack clear policies and initiatives for promoting students' capabilities through extracurricular activities. Detailed, comprehensive university policies should be drafted with participation from students, faculty, and administration for student societies alongside other extracurricular activities for the student population. Specific reforms to consider include the following:

- Reduce bureaucratic hurdles for student societies and give them more autonomy to generate, develop, and execute their plans. Students should seamlessly be able to start a new society provided they meet the overarching policy's requirements.
- A faculty member should be assigned (and compensated) to every student society and serve as mentor and patron to help student societies materialize their ideas.

- Create a university calendar and define minimum number of events per year, minimum number of members, minimum funds generated, etc.

▶ Student Skills Development

Outside of a few HEIs, it is university management, not students, that decides the leaders and executive body of student societies. Student societies should be internally democratic, with members themselves electing the executive council in a fair and transparent manner every year. Additionally, students should be given to autonomy to raise funds for their activities while also being trained in how to develop concept notes, develop donor profiles, and nurture stakeholder relationships.

▶ Resources for Recreational Activities

Many HEIs lack recreational activities outside of those with an academic focus. Sporting facilities should be invested in, and tournaments organized in order to incentivize students to participate and build a university culture through sports. Crucially, specific interventions for encouraging female participation should be employed.

Alumni Engagement & Development

▶ Policy & Resource Creation

Alumni engagement is largely missing at the HEIs included in this study. Detailed, comprehensive university policy should be drafted in consultation with students, faculty, and administration on the overarching strategic vision for alumni engagement. Additionally, the creation of an office with dedicated, trained staff is crucial for effectively implementing alumni engagement initiatives.

▶ Database Creation

Universities largely lack digital database and follow-up surveys with alumni. A formal database should be maintained and updated every semester, with privacy policies specifically outlined for alumni and staff alike. Data points to include but are not limited to:

- Contact information
- Degree program
- Employment sector
- Geographic location(s)
- Starting salary
- Income trajectories
- Organizational affiliations

▶ Alumni Cards

A systematic approach to alumni cards should be pursued, whereby graduates pay a certain fee to obtain the benefits card. A renewal process (e.g., every 6 months) should be in place, in which information pertaining to the database is requested so that administrative oversight is minimized and replaced by a self-sustaining model. Cards may come with certain benefits, such as discounts at hotels, restaurants, gymnasiums, as well as special access to university premises.

▶ Fundraising through Alumni Events & Recognition

Regular events – including workshops, seminars, conferences, short courses, music festivals, film screenings, travel adventures, homecomings, and more – should be organized specifically for alumni in order to act as an incentive to remain involved with university activities. Additionally, recognition mechanisms should be place for standout alumni, including high-achievers and large donors, in the form of testimonials, walls/halls of fame, invitations as guest-speakers for motivational speeches, special interviews for university website and social media, and more. Fundraisers should also be organized in the form of special events like conferences, whereby alumni are asked to leverage their personal networks and bring in resources for the university in exchange for access to the university's platform.

▶ Connecting Study Societies

Student societies should be engaged in establishing informal platforms, such as WhatsApp/Facebook groups, that can allow alumni to engage with one another as well as current students to share useful information, job opportunities, and details of events that may be of interest – without minimal oversight from the university administration.

Mental Health & Well-being

▶ Dedicated Facilities for Mental Health

There should be an exclusive facility for mental health and wellbeing in each university (even if the psychology department is already carrying out the job informally or formally), staffed by individuals with specialized training (e.g., therapists, psychologists, psychiatrists) as opposed to generalists. Linkages should also be nurtured with local hospitals/clinics for voluntary visits of their experts to these universities once a week. This allows HEIs to better support mental health in a comprehensive manner with dedicated staff. It is also recommended to HEIs offer online sessions to help counteract combat social stigma concerns associate with attending an appointment in person.

▶ Privacy Policies

The privacy of students and staff must be a top priority for HEIs. This includes, but is not limited to, all information pertaining to their visit and information revealed to a mental health expert. Clear policy on this matter, which also includes zero tolerance for violations, should be developed and employed by HEIs.

▶ Mental Health Awareness Sessions

HEIs should dedicate awareness sessions and trainings to the topic of mental health to the student body as a whole, faculty, staff, and even parents, to help begin breaking down the stigmas associated with mental health support.

Women & Marginalized Students

▸ Awareness Sessions & Courses for Students

HEIs should conduct dedicated seminar sessions for all incoming university students during their first week on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) issues in order to educate and sensitize the study body about the specific concerns that marginalized groups face. HEIs could also introduce mandatory courses that outline the historical injustices against certain communities – whether religious, ethnic, and/or gender-based – delving into the sociopolitical and economic factors that contributed to them.

▸ Awareness Sessions for Staff

Teaching and non-teaching staff members must be sensitized via workshops, seminars, and/or short courses to the concerns – whether explicit or implicit – of the student community in all educational institutions, particularly with regards to women, transgender individuals, students from ethnic/religious minority groups, and students with disabilities.

Teaching and non-teaching staff members must be sensitized via workshops, seminars, and/or short courses to the concerns of the student community in all educational institutions

▸ Policy Measures

Specific policy measures to combat the inequities detailed in this report include but are not limited to:

- Expansion of scholarships and/or financial aid to students from disenfranchised communities in order to expand accessibility and redress structural inequities

- Quotas for women in leadership positions, particularly within student societies

- For every all-male sports team officially registered in the university, one all-female sports team should exist

- If facilities on campus are disproportionately used by males (e.g., sports grounds), establish timing for female-only activities

- Ramps installed at the entrance of each major building on campus in order to facilitate people with disabilities. Additionally, All students with disabilities must be granted close attention at the beginning of their programs to chart out a clear protocol for how they are to seamlessly navigate the various demands of the university – whether that be in terms of academics or mobility around campus – depending on their specific needs

- Setting up Grievance Redressal System for all marginalized students, with a new committee for every new case, along with complainants' right to appeal for reconstitution of the committee

- All HEIs should have a conducive environment and required infrastructures for transgender individuals, for instance, separate washrooms. In the immediate term, a clear policy ought to be established as to how they can make use of existing limited facilities in an optimal manner

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While many of the above recommendations require the HEIs to initiate change, the broader governing landscape also requires policy change, transparency, and clarity. Following the 18th amendment of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, which granted more autonomy to the provinces, all provinces now have their own HEC departments in addition to the federal HEC that supports the macro-level policy frameworks. With the creation of new levels of governance, there are now overlapping functions and confusion about the specific role that each actor must play. This scenario can oftentimes lead to stagnancy in the higher education sector, where the different actors are reluctant to pursue initiatives without further clarification on matters such as functions, authority, policy formulation, and revenue generation.

Thus, it is proposed that clear lines be drawn for what each actor – the federal HEC, the provincial HEC, and individual HEIs – must do. By creating clear roles and responsibilities, all parties can better identify and implement solutions that can support the youth of Pakistan in successfully pursuing employment and contributing to the future of the country as a whole.