

# IIM draft code seeks to gag dissent

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**Joka:** IIM Calcutta has circulated among teachers a draft code of conduct that bars them from making any public criticism of any “current or recent policy or action” of the institute or the state and central governments.

The board of governors, the highest decision-making body of the B-school, has drawn up the draft that bars the institute community from making “any communication to the press, in any public utterance, any statement of fact or opinion:- which has the effect of an adverse criticism of any current or recent policy or action of the institute”.

The draft says, among other things, “no member of the institute community giving such evidence shall criticise the policy or any action of the Institute or the Central Government or any State Government”.

Teachers have written back to the institute about their opposition to the draft, citing examples of universities abroad that encourage freedom of expression. The teachers have pointed out that stakeholders in an organisation must have the right to speak against wrong policies of the authorities.

As many as 60 of the 76 teachers of the Joka institute had written to the Union education ministry in December, expressing the fear that the board was contemplating imposing restrictions on their freedom of expression.

Teachers at the B-school think the final code won't deviate much from the draft, given what they describe as efforts to subvert the atmosphere of plurality on the campus over the past few years.

The proposed rules dealing with the chapter on criticism of the institute says: "No member of the Institute Community shall in any Radio/TV broadcast, Social Media, Electronic Media, Print media or in any document published anonymously, pseudonymously or in his/her own name or in the name of any other person.... which has the effect of an adverse criticism of any current or recent policy or action of the institute."

It goes on to add: "No member of the Institute Community.... shall criticise the policy or any action of the Institute or the Central Government or any State Government."

An official of the institute said the board would go through the feedback before approving the final code.

In their feedback to the board, a section of IIM teachers has written: "Last year, heads of 31 colleges in Cambridge wrote a letter to *The Times* about the opportunities and obstacles of the University's decision to move online. MIT faculty recently wrote an open letter to Congress in the USA urging them for a strong coronavirus stimulus package helping economically vulnerable households and small businesses."

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# Mute call in IIM

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The feedback goes on to add: "University of Birmingham, in its conduct policy, states that it tries to 'ensure that members of Academic Staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions'." "University of California, Berkeley, vividly states that the academic community should have enjoyment of constitutionally protected freedom of expression."

In complete contrast to this, again, the proposed Code of Conduct in 4.17.2 suggests that no member of the institute 'shall criticise the policy....' This is a departure from conduct policies at best institutes worldwide that stress that stakeholders in an organisation have the right to speak out against any wrong policies, because otherwise the organisation will never get rid of wrong policies!"

The teachers' feedback was sent to Alok Chandra, the

secretary to the board. When contacted, Chandra declined comment.

The chairman of the board, Srikrishna Kulkarni, and the acting director of the institute, Subir Bhattacharya, also declined comment.

Repeated calls to Anju Seth, during whose tenure as director the draft code was prepared, went unanswered.

The content of the draft code bears a close resemblance to a notice that IIT Kharagpur had issued in June last year to stop teachers from "making adverse criticism of any current policy and action of the institute in public".

At the IIT, the freedom of expression has been curbed so much that teachers had remained mute in public but fulminated in private when the institute in February renamed Dr BC Roy Institute of Medical Sciences and Research after Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the founder of the Jana Sangh, who had nothing to do with either medicine or the premier tech school.