

Dear Students,

I hope that your family and you are keeping safe and healthy at home. GITAM's response to the pandemic is guided by our concern for the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff, while enabling students to stay on track to complete their education and get their degrees with least possible disruption to their academic calendars. We're closely monitoring the evolving situation in order to prepare and respond as necessary.

I am happy to share an update on examinations, and in general, on our transition to online learning. First, a word about online learning.

Transition to Online since Covid lockdown

1. University has been closed since 16th March 2020. In a very short period, the classes and mid-term examinations were moved online. This was not an easy experience for GITAM, to say the least. Just like you, everyone had to flip to a new mode of interaction literally overnight. Many faculty members who hadn't had experience teaching and working online were forced to move with very little preparation or practice. We understand hearing from many of you that this learning experience was not as good as you would have expected based on your in-classroom experience. We are taking many steps, including signing a long-term partnership with Coursera, and creating the office of Digital Learning, to ensure that the online teaching and learning experience improves significantly in the coming semesters. While online will never replace the classroom experience, it can greatly supplement what is taught in the classroom. The model we will be adopting going forward is one of blended-learning, thus maximizing the benefits of both modes.
2. Partnering with Coursera was our first step in the direction of online/blended approach. Just like many of you, all of our faculty members have received access to Coursera licenses. We have recommended that they experience the platform and get exposure to the various teaching styles and techniques used by professors or international repute, and the signs so far are very encouraging. Almost all faculty members are active learners on the Coursera platform today with several of them completing many courses each. I'm sure this experience will positively impact their online as well as in-class teaching skills going forward.

Conduct of examinations (final years)

3. As the final year students are soon entering the workplace or are going to pursue higher studies, we wanted to ensure that they would not have any barriers from employers and other universities if exams were not conducted. We also believed that in the final year students' last semester, a final exam would be the appropriate conclusion of their degree requirements and their time at GITAM.

4. We recognized that students faced issues in attempting mid-term exams initially (such as server crashes, bandwidth problems and syllabus issues), largely in the first week, particularly in Hyderabad campus. This was the first time that we had conducted online exams at scale, and we had to adapt quickly to meet the immediate need and at a massive scale, which resulted in less than optimal experience for many of you. Almost all of these issues were resolved briskly, and since then close to 70,000 mid-term exams had been taken by students successfully from all programs and class years with no major disruption on the G Quiz platform.
5. Regardless, when time came to conduct the semester-end (final) exams for the outgoing students, there was an undue amount of fear about taking the exams on our internal platform. As a result, we chose to go with a reputed external vendor, who had helped us conduct our GAT exam successfully for more than 20,000 twelfth class students, without any issues.
6. A tremendous amount of planning, preparation, training and dry-runs took place for the final year semester-end exams through updated exam policies and multiple mock tests for our students as well as invigilators to experience the MCQs and online platform.
7. I am happy to report that the final exams for all final years, totalling 18,504 exams in all, were conducted successfully from June 8th to June 19th, with 98.88% participation. We are separately addressing the 1.1% students, who could not participate for various reasons. Examinations were held smoothly in a wide range of scenarios – such as loss of network, power outages, issues with devices and poor bandwidth. There was not a single instance of server crashing. Students did not find the questions unfamiliar and were able to attempt them well.
8. Most importantly, we now have an audit log of each, and every exam conducted – which helped us to quickly identify issues students faced and respond promptly, while trying to permanently resolve the issue where possible.

Conduct of examinations (non-final years)

9. As you might have noticed from the experience of the final year students, while anxiety surrounding online exams originated from their prior experiences, with proper preparation and use of right technology, education and support, we were able to overcome the challenges and allay the fears. Many students have vouched that the online experience turned out to be much better than the in-person exam. Online exams may very well be the new normal just like so many changes we have been experiencing around us since Covid.
10. The experience of conducting online exams for the final years has given us the full confidence to adopt the online model in the future. We were fully ready to extend the success with the final years to conduct semester-end exams for the rest of the students, who are ending their even semesters (2nd, 4th, 6th, etc. semesters as the case may be, other than final-years).
11. While we are confident that we can conduct all semester-end exams for non-final year students just like we did for the final year students, we discussed internally at length about what the right thing to

do would be, taking into consideration external factors, developments in the Indian higher education space, and the feedback received from students through various sources. After considering all factors, **GITAM has decided to suspend the semester-end examinations of all non-final year students in their II, IV or VI semesters in the disciplines of Engineering, Management, Sciences, Humanities & Social Sciences, and Architecture.** All of these students will be promoted based on their marks in internal exams. The semester grade results will be declared by mid-July. For the other disciplines - Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing and Law we are awaiting information from the respective statutory councils to take a final decision before we can update you.

Information for supplementary exams and students with backlogs

12. For students who wish to improve their grades, an opportunity will be provided to take the exams at a later date. Students with pending evaluation of internal assessments will be given an opportunity to take supplementary exams.
13. The schedule of supplementary exams for backlog subjects will be communicated to you at a later date.
14. The revised Academic Calendar for the Year 2020-21 will be communicated to you based on the guidelines issued by the government.

What next?

We did not choose this pandemic, but we can choose how to respond to it. Today, some of you might feel a temporary relief from not having to attempt the semester-end examinations. However, Covid and the digital transformation accompanying it are reshaping the world and those who continue to resist this change will get left behind. We urge those of you who want to avoid online exams out of fear to introspect on how you want to approach your education and career from now on. We are doing the same in GITAM. We look at this crisis as an opportunity to re-imagine higher education and to work towards offering a high-quality holistic education that is relevant to the changing times and at par with the best in the world.

We request you to make the best use of the lockdown period to develop new skillsets that will help you academically as well as with your own personal development through the various options online and in particular by maximizing learning through the GITAM-Coursera partnership.

If you have any questions and are in need of any help, do not hesitate to reach out to us at help@gitam.edu.

With Best Wishes,
VICE CHANCELLOR