

Dear Students,

I hope you all are keeping well. Life has changed drastically for all of us (students, staff and faculty) since March 2020. However, as a resilient TISS community, we are coping, as best as is possible, in the new normal world.

The TISS administration and faculty are committed to academic continuity for students despite pandemic challenges and this is evident from the facts presented in the Table below. As can be seen there has been no significant lag and delays in holding exams, declaring results and even holding convocation (for recent graduates), in completing admissions and launching the current academic year, in beginning classes and completing 1<sup>st</sup>/ 3<sup>rd</sup>semesters, and now beginning the 2<sup>nd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup>semesters. The Office of Students' Affairs has supported students in difficult circumstances because of the pandemic, with distribution of laptops and data packs, student aid and scholarships, and the Academic Section has facilitated fee payment by giving extensions in last date of payment and delinking fee payment with semester registration. No student has been kept out of classes because of fee issues. The facts and figures are detailed below.

**However, despite these wide ranging proactive steps of the OSA and the Academic Section, some students are creating a false impression about the Institute in public media and with the general student body, by issuing statements that the Institute is 'profiteering from distress' and is 'privatising education'. These are highly objectionable and unacceptable statements coming from these students.**

Please read the actual facts yourself for learning about the supportive actions of the Institute:

Table: The TISS Calendar Scheduling post March 2020

<p>March, April, May 2020</p> <p><b>Lock Down phase</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Online submission of thesis, Online submission of grades</li> <li>2. Online Personal Interviews for UG and PG admission</li> <li>3. Declaration of fourth semester results</li> <li>4. M.Phil and Ph.D viva through online Mode</li> <li>5. Declaration of M.Phil results</li> </ol>
<p>June, July, August 2020</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Declaration of third semester results and admission results.</li> <li>2. Online personal interviews for M.Phil and Ph.D</li> <li>3. Training of staff to accommodate to online functioning</li> <li>4. Creation of TISSOL platform</li> <li>5. Faculty and Staff training for online mode of transaction</li> <li>6. Content Creation by faculty to suit online pedagogy.</li> <li>7. Committee to assess the needs of students</li> <li>8. Dispatching of laptops to students in need. Special requests to courier facilities to reach the laptop to remote parts.</li> <li>9. Aid allocation for the second year students to cover their fees, based on the recommendation of Deans.</li> </ol>
<p>August, September, October 2020</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Zoom online session/classes for students</li> <li>2. Money transferred for the data pack for the needy students as recommended by Deans.</li> <li>3. Conduct of online exams and assessments</li> </ol>

November, December, 2020	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Assessment and finalising semester results</li><li>2. Preparatory work for admissions 2021</li><li>3. Committee to review feasibility of reopening of campuses and conduct of offline / hybrid mode class.</li><li>4. Virtual Convocation</li></ol>
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The table is not exhaustive and it just provides the highlights and we believe, as responsible adults, you will be able to comprehend the relentless efforts and human and financial resources that would have gone in to making all this possible.

**Key pertinent issues are further detailed below for information to ALL Students to ensure that messages put out by some students, on various media outlets, do not mislead you and our external stakeholders, and harm the interest of the general student body.**

**Fees:** We want to inform all students that Fee is an administrative matter. Like all universities, the Institute too has set processes and procedures for fee matters which have been followed. However, TISS has always, including in Covid times, been sensitive to the needs of students and have been creating necessary support mechanisms for the benefit of students as explained above. Discussions amongst the Deans regarding fees and the possibilities of reduction started even before the beginning of the new academic year. The School Deans perused the fees of their respective schools and reworked on the charges by reducing certain components as you have noticed in the fees for the last semester. Please Note:

1. The fee has already been reduced across all programmes since the beginning of this academic year. Students' concerns are always taken proactively by the Institute and necessary amendments were done in the fee structure in the previous semester (1<sup>st</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup>sem). The same will be done in the current semester too. Since the decision to continue online learning for the current semester is taken now, reducing fees for components which require reduction or removal has been initiated and the same will be notified soon. The fee payment process is suspended for the time being for necessary updation.
2. As mature and responsible students, you may understand that fee is not charged for 'on-campus experience' but for imparting education, which is being done through the TISSOL platform. TISSOL is being used extensively for online classes across the 52 PG and 3 UG programs and therefore fee shall remain at the present level. For your information TISSOL is NOT A FREE VIRTUAL PLATFORM. We are paying for zoom licences not only for courses but also for holding meetings with students and secretariats. In the last semester we have hosted 100 plus zoom teaching sessions daily excluding meetings and other interactions with students in small batches. In addition we have trained several faculty and staff members for TISSOL platform and to conduct zoom classes/ meetings.
3. It is incorrect to say that if the campus is not opened for students, the expenses towards operating educational activities and functioning of the institute are zero or reduced substantially. Following all government regulations and being a humane institution, we continue to pay all the staff of the Institute including staff members who provide exclusive service to students such as those in Hostels and Dining Halls. However none of these are charged to students (no hostel and DH fee is charged). We also continue to pay staff in Guest house, Health Centre, and Library. Moreover, Library's digital services are being widely used by students including Ph.D scholars and faculty.
4. No student has been prevented from attending classes on TISSOL or participating in any academic activities due to non-payment or delay in fee payment. Not even a single student was penalised for non-payment of fees. This year the late fee element has been removed completely. It is to be noted that the fee payment received so far is **merely 45%** for second semester **and just 27%** for fourth Semester. It is also important to note that students have accrued deficits across semesters as well, because some have carried dues from their first semester. 51 students who have received aid to clear their fourth semester fees, are in the 27% who have paid their fees.

LIKE ANY OTHER UNIVERSITY TISS ALSO EXPECTS STUDENTS TO PAY FEES SO THAT IT CAN FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY.

Support Mechanisms operationalised in the context of Covid Pandemic and holding of online classes are presented below;

1. TISS is supporting students to the extent possible by giving them laptops (couriering to their addresses), and reimbursing costs for data packs for several students. Students belonging to SC/ST communities who are eligible for GOI-PMS are expected to pay only the Health insurance component and the Students' Union charges which is only INR 1750 for the semester, however the SU fund will be refunded by a particular date, if the same has not been utilised. Most of the OBC-NC students were supported with their full fees from an external grant. The financial support extended to individual students varies from Rs. 10,000 to Rs.1,30,000/-. Summary of such supports extended are:
  - Laptops dispatched to students: 125 Nos and courier charges borne by the institute for the same is Rs.2,13,513.00
  - Data pack support: 53 Students @ INR. 300 per month for 5 months, and a total of Rs. 79500/- has been transferred so far to the applicants.

Student aid	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21
From the institute (includes individual donors)	<b>Rs. 81,20,417.00</b>	<b>INR. 6,20,600.00 has been mapped already for the second years.</b>
From external donors/scholarships mobilised by TISS	<b>Rs. 75,85,800.00</b> <b>In addition we also facilitated grants amounting to Rs. 38,92,100.00 that was directly paid to the students</b>	Rs. 34,03,750.00 (Awaiting few more scholarships in the coming month) Completed the process for 28 fellowships amounting to 28 lakhs.

Efforts are on to continue the support to the extent possible for this semester too. Here we would also like to acknowledge that a student led initiative **BRIDGE has also contributed to the tune of INR 8 lakhs to support 18 students** in the last semester for the 2018-2020 batch. Thus at this juncture, the negative campaigns definitely is not helpful while we are hugely relying on scholarships/Aid from external resources.

## 2. Health and Mental Health Support:

Even before the fee payment process, the institute enrolled for Health insurance which includes Covid treatment costs, keeping in mind need for such cover that may emerge for students as well. The several sessions for peer counsellors and the individual students in distress is offered completely free of cost to all the users. Mental Health is the most discussed concern amidst the pandemic. The counselling sessions are open till 10 pm on all week days. Our Counsellors have conducted several fb live sessions, training programs, and workshops to keep the students connected.

3. **Placements:** With lots of hope the final semester students are gearing up for placements, the brochures are being circulated to several organisations. We are also beginning to interface with alumni and experts for online sessions that otherwise was not possible in offline mode.

TISS is taking utmost care of its students by facilitating mechanisms of support and at the same time deliberating to see how to make online pedagogy effective and inclusive. It takes efforts and financial resources for students to study online and also for every staff and faculty who have committed to work beyond the routine working hours to see the students graduating in flying colours.

Thus, it is highly irresponsible on the part of a group of students for projecting the Institute as "profiteering from distress" and "privatisation of education". **Such unfounded allegations and insinuations spread by these students and student groups, who have vested interests of their own, through negative and misleading narrative in the media and on their social media platforms, are gravely harming the interest of all students and the Institute alike, and will not be tolerated.**

We strongly object to the actions of these few students or groups that are misleading the public. We are equally appalled to note that even beneficiaries of aid/scholarships misrepresent the facts and malign the name of the Institute in various public fora.

Uncertainties, insecurities and fear can cloud our judgement. We urge and request our students to move forward with clarity, assess things for themselves. Be assured that TISS is definitely taking all steps to safe-guard the well-being of every student. Together we will sail through this phase. In the meantime, stay positive.

Be kind to yourself and others. Also we request you to support us in all possible ways to reach out to those who are less fortunate and more vulnerable.

The Deans and the faculty are in regular touch with the CRs to understand the required support and reach out to you all as much as possible. Also, the undersigned, as Dean SA, I have been in communication with some of you on various matters over the last several months, tried to understand concerns and work towards resolving the same.

We are one among the few Universities who have declared the final results on time. This has facilitated the outgoing students to apply for higher studies elsewhere and some of them will certainly secure seats in reputed universities in India and abroad.

Wishing you a hopeful 2021...and seeking your cooperation in moving confidently ahead in our academic journey. Good luck!

Prof. Asha Banu

Dean Students Affairs