

MARIS STELLA COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), VIJAYAWADA
INSTITUTIONAL DISTINCTIVENESS: 2019-20

Empowerment through Inclusiveness:

To contribute to a just and equitable society is part of the vision of the institution. Inclusiveness, excellence and social justice are some of its core values. It is the endeavor of the college to convert this vision into reality.

The college was set up in 1962 to address the lack of a premier institution of higher education for women. Its mission was to empower women through quality education. If women are discriminated on the basis of sex, then the woman of a lower class socially and economically, is thrice discriminated. It is to women drawn from this section of society, discriminated on three counts that the college reaches out so that they can be empowered, enriched and transformed through inclusion.

The student profile of the college reveals that at least 75% of the students are drawn from the sections that are marginalized on account of sex, social status and economic class. They are the daughters of slum dwellers, eking out a living as manual labourers or as lowly employees, from single parent or from otherwise disturbed homes with poor schooling and no exposure to anything beyond the squalor and deprivation of their surroundings.

The college admits them, irrespective of caste, class or creed and puts them on the path to empowerment. Their needs are identified and addressed through the systems put in place for this purpose. In general, their needs can be classified as academic, financial, social and psychological.

Academically, these students do not have a good foundation in their core subjects due to the kind of schools they have come from. Levels are ascertained through screening tests by course teachers. Bridge courses, peer teaching and remedial coaching are arranged. Drawn into a well-planned and executed curriculum, supported by good learning resources and well-equipped laboratories and other supportive infrastructure, by the end of the first year, most of them are

main-streamed into the campus community. Workshops, study projects and student seminars, internships and on-the-job training provide the practical component of the academic programme. The college has a number of MoUs with various organizations for this purpose.

Most of the students from these sections have financial problems. The college disbursed scholarships and financial aid to the tune of Rs.1, 12, 82, 527/- during 2019-20 alone. Free mid-day meals are available to the neediest among them. Books are available on loan from the Book Bank. A portion of the money raised from the Annual Fete is set aside for them. Individual cases needing further assistance are dealt with on a case-to case basis.

The mentoring system helps significantly in contributing to social and psychological integration. Every newly admitted student is assigned a mentor who takes her under her wing and is friend, guide and teacher to her through her years in the institution so that she is made to feel secure and comfortable from the start of her programme in college. The mentor meets her mentees regularly during the mentoring period within the college hours and is also available at any other time. The mentor records each mentee's personal details, follows her academic progress, is in touch with her home and counsels and guides her in both academic and personal matters. In cases warranting professional help, the mentor seeks the support of the trained counsellor on campus.

The college believes in holistic education. All students are mandated to complete courses in Life Skills such as Values and Professional Ethics, Leadership, Environment, Computer and Soft Skills. They also take Skill Development Courses and are free to choose from a number of add-on certificate courses and extra-curricular activities such as games and sports and cultural activities to further equip themselves with global competencies. There are various clubs set up to promote activities in a range of areas that the student can join, based on her inclination and aptitude.

Students are sensitized to community service through the programmes of Stellites to Awaken and Reach Out to Society (STARS) and the Department of Social Work. Every student must take up a community service project for a fixed number of hours under the supervision of a mentor and in tune with the concept of Service Learning.

To inculcate a spirit of nationalism and civic responsibility, all national festivals are celebrated and used as a platform to create awareness of not only the rights but also the duties of citizens. The glories of our ancient civilization and our achievements as a nation are highlighted to evoke a sense of pride and purpose. International days of importance are also observed.

Students are encouraged to think independently and are motivated to take up jobs and to earn their own livelihood as a step towards empowerment. Gender equity programmes on campus are designed to highlight the vulnerability of women and the need to mitigate it by empowerment, by every woman joining the battle against discrimination so that she does not fall prey to domestic violence and has the strength to stand and fight for herself.

Towards this end, students are given career guidance and counselling to prepare them for life on passing out of the college. Those academically-inclined are offered guidance on progression to higher studies while those who prefer to begin a career are supported by the placement services of the college.

The efforts of the college in drawing the marginalized into the mainstream through its policy of inclusiveness has yielded results as the number of students finding placements, becoming entrepreneurs, progressing to higher studies has been going up steadily. More than anything, the college is turning out empowered young women who think critically, are strong mentally and hold out the promise of becoming agents of change.