Re-Examining the UGC Career Advancement Scheme: Policy, Practice, and Pitfalls in Higher Education of Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The University Grants Commission's Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) was envisioned as a structured pathway to promote academic excellence and ensure equitable professional progression among faculty in Indian higher education institutions. While the scheme has undergone several revisions to enhance fairness and accountability, its on-ground implementation—particularly in frontier regions such as Arunachal Pradesh—reveals deep-seated procedural, ethical, and psychological challenges.

This paper critically re-examines the CAS policy through the lens of regional disparities, highlighting how bureaucratic inertia, shifting regulatory interpretations, and a narrow focus on quantifiable academic metrics have diluted the scheme's original intent. Drawing upon qualitative insights from faculty interviews, RTI data, and institutional records, the study exposes gaps between policy and practice. It also underscores the marginalization of teaching ethics, mentoring, and classroom engagement in favor of score-oriented academic outputs.

The findings call for a recalibration of the CAS framework to restore its foundational ethos—equity, empowerment, and academic integrity—by recommending digital transparency tools, ethical sensitization, and a balance between qualitative and quantitative assessment metrics.

Keywords: UGC-CAS, Faculty Promotion, Higher Education, Arunachal Pradesh, Academic Policy, Professional Ethics, API Score, Bureaucratic Delay

1. Introduction

The University Grants Commission (UGC) introduced the Career Advancement Scheme (CAS) as part of a broader effort to incentivize excellence in teaching, research, and academic service within Indian higher education institutions. Conceptualized as a structured mechanism to ensure upward mobility and career recognition, CAS is underpinned by a performance-based appraisal system that emphasizes Academic Performance Indicators (API), publication records, and participation in faculty development activities. Since its inception, CAS has undergone significant revisions—notably in 2010, 2016, and through the 4th Amendment in 2021—each aiming to align academic promotions with evolving standards of accountability and merit.

While CAS offers a promising framework in theory, its practical implementation has encountered several roadblocks, particularly in geographically remote and administratively under-resourced states like Arunachal Pradesh. The region's unique challenges—ranging from logistical inaccessibility and

infrastructural deficiencies to shortages in trained personnel—have compounded issues such as procedural delays, misinterpretation of guidelines, and ethical compromises.

Moreover, the increasing pressure on faculty to produce quantifiable academic outputs has in many cases overshadowed core values like mentorship, classroom engagement, and educational integrity. In the absence of consistent regulatory interpretation and digital oversight, institutions in Arunachal Pradesh struggle to uphold both the spirit and letter of CAS.

This paper seeks to critically re-examine the CAS framework in the regional context of Arunachal Pradesh. Through a qualitative and document-based analysis, it explores the operational gaps, ethical dilemmas, and psychological impacts experienced by faculty members and administrative personnel. By bridging the gap between policy and practice, the study aims to offer region-specific recommendations for a more equitable and effective implementation of CAS.

2. Review of Literature

A growing body of literature critically evaluates the evolution and implementation of the Career Advancement Scheme in India. Jha (2018) argues that the over-reliance on quantifiable metrics like API scores often distorts the real academic contribution of teachers and encourages a checkbox approach to professional development. Similarly, Sharma (2021) contends that the structure of CAS has become overly bureaucratic, with faculty members focusing more on meeting formal criteria than on enhancing their pedagogical effectiveness.

Mukhopadhyay and Parhar (2017) analyze the CAS in light of academic freedom, suggesting that excessive regulatory oversight through API norms may stifle creativity and autonomy among educators. In another study, Menon (2019) emphasizes the gap between policy rhetoric and on-ground practices, especially in institutions with limited administrative capacities.

Regional perspectives are also emerging. Doley and Tayeng (2020) explore CAS-related challenges in the North-East and document inconsistencies in regulatory application, lack of timely notifications, and insufficient awareness among faculty. Singh (2022) highlights similar trends in hill and tribal areas, where infrastructural and human resource constraints further complicate CAS implementation.

These studies collectively underline that while CAS is a well-intended mechanism for faculty growth, its execution remains uneven and often demotivating. They also call for a re-balancing of evaluation criteria to reflect both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of academic work, including ethics, mentoring, and classroom engagement.

Despite these insights, there is limited literature that specifically focuses on Arunachal Pradesh, creating a gap that this study aims to address.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the procedural challenges in implementing CAS in Arunachal Pradesh.
- To assess the impact of CAS on faculty motivation and professional ethics.
- To identify policy-level ambiguities and regional administrative bottlenecks.
- To suggest reforms to improve transparency, timeliness, and ethical grounding in CAS procedures.

4. Methodology

A qualitative research design was employed, involving:

- **Document Analysis**: Notifications, circulars, RTI replies, CAS regulations (2010–2021).

- **Key Informant Interviews**: 15 faculty members from government colleges across Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Case Documentation**: Instances of delayed promotions (2–6 years), inconsistent evaluation committees, and overlapping regulations.

Data was thematically analyzed, with attention to recurring patterns of procedural ambiguity, delay, and ethical concerns.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Procedural Delays

Multiple institutions faced delays of 2–5 years in releasing CAS notifications, leading to a backlog of eligible faculty. Faculty interviews indicated that repeated follow-up letters had received no response, and some applicants were even told to resubmit their documents under the latest regulations, resulting in further procedural delays and confusion.

Supporting this, a circular from the Directorate of Higher and Technical Education, Itanagar (Ref. No. DHTE/CAS/2021-22/341 dated July 18, 2022), acknowledged "administrative backlog and lack of clarity regarding applicable UGC guidelines" as causes for delays. This reflects systemic inertia exacerbated by frequent changes in regulatory frameworks and a lack of dedicated CAS monitoring cells in most institutions. The backlog not only delayed career progression but also impacted faculty morale and institutional trust.

5.2. Regulatory Confusion

Faculty and administrators often cited confusion over which version of UGC regulations to follow—namely the 2010, 4th Amendment 2016, 2018 guidelines. Due to delays in official notifications, lack of training, and inadequate dissemination of updated rules, colleges operated with different interpretations of the applicable norms. This inconsistency has led to significant procedural and evaluative irregularities.

In several cases, promotion applications originally submitted under the 2010 regulations were evaluated using the revised criteria introduced in the 2016 and 4th Amendment regulations, resulting in incorrect API score calculations and ineligibility issues. For example, certain activities categorized under Category III in the 2010 guidelines were either omitted or misclassified under the 2016 API system.

Additionally, many screening committees were constituted without proper orientation to the prevailing UGC regulation year, resulting in variable criteria across institutions—even within the same time frame. This regulatory flux has not only caused delays and rejections but also triggered appeals and grievances from affected faculty, thereby eroding confidence in the fairness and consistency of the CAS process.

5.3. Ethical Undermining

The emphasis on research publications, seminar attendance, and conference participation has, in many cases, incentivized a race for points rather than authentic academic growth. This over-dependence on quantifiable metrics has led to unethical shortcuts and compromised academic integrity.

A significant number of faculty, especially from institutions with limited access to reputed publishing avenues, have turned to predatory journals to fulfill minimum API requirements. These journals, which lack rigorous peer review, are often chosen for their fast processing and guaranteed acceptance. The quality and originality of such publications remain questionable, but they continue to contribute to promotion metrics.

Similarly, faculty members have reported instances of attending academic conferences and seminars without active engagement—often registering attendance and leaving without participating in sessions. Some even shared certificates for the same seminar, highlighting the loopholes in the verification mechanisms.

Academic outputs, such as minor projects or publications, are frequently produced not as a result of genuine inquiry but to meet score thresholds. In interviews, faculty expressed that they felt compelled to prioritize publication quantity over classroom quality to meet CAS norms.

This pressure has marginalized foundational academic values like sincerity in teaching, student mentorship, and classroom commitment. The situation is particularly acute in rural and under-resourced colleges, where infrastructural limitations further push faculty toward minimum-score strategies rather than meaningful academic work. Ultimately, this undermines both educational quality and the ethical fabric of the teaching profession.

5.4. Psychological and Professional Impact

Faculty morale has been adversely affected by the prolonged uncertainty and inconsistent application of CAS procedures, leading to significant psychological and professional repercussions.

The absence of clear timelines and repeated administrative lapses have resulted in a widespread erosion of trust in institutional processes. Faculty members, particularly those who have served in remote or rural colleges for extended periods, expressed feelings of being undervalued and ignored by the very systems meant to support their professional growth.

As a consequence, many educators have grown apathetic toward pursuing professional development activities such as workshops, research, or community engagement initiatives—seeing them more as bureaucratic obligations than opportunities for growth. In interviews, some faculty members admitted to losing interest in academic publishing or training, having faced rejection or inaction on their CAS submissions despite fulfilling eligibility norms.

This prolonged uncertainty also contributes to increased occupational stress. Faculty have reported feeling anxious about their career prospects and financial stability due to the cascading effect of delayed promotions on pay scale revisions, retirement benefits, and professional recognition. The emotional toll is especially high for those nearing retirement, whose final pay grades are dependent on the successful processing of CAS applications. In the long term, this climate of procedural stagnation may drive talented educators away from the profession or discourage future candidates from entering academia in underserved regions like Arunachal Pradesh.

6. Recommendations

a) Establish a Uniform Implementation Protocol

The state higher education department must issue clear, binding timelines and protocol checklists for all institutions. This should include predefined deadlines for screening committee formation, document verification, and issuance of promotion orders. Institutions must also be periodically audited for compliance. A state-level oversight committee should be created to monitor and ensure adherence to UGC norms uniformly across all colleges.

b) Balance Quantitative and Qualitative Metrics

The current API system is overly reliant on quantifiable outcomes such as publications and seminars, which often overlook the lived experiences of teaching. It is essential to introduce a balanced scorecard that integrates teaching effectiveness (through peer review and student feedback), contributions to

curriculum development, mentoring, and involvement in local academic and community-based projects. Such qualitative elements can capture faculty impact more holistically, especially in under-resourced rural institutions.

c) Digital Tracking and Transparency

To reduce procedural opacity, all CAS applications should be uploaded and monitored through a central digital portal developed by the state higher education authority. This portal should include real-time status tracking, built-in deadlines, applicant dashboards, and grievance redressal mechanisms. It must be synchronized with UGC norms to auto-flag inconsistencies and send alerts for pending actions. This would improve accountability and eliminate discretionary delays.

d) Reinforce Ethical Commitment

Institutions must go beyond procedural compliance and actively promote academic integrity. Orientation and sensitization workshops should be made mandatory for faculty and administrators involved in CAS processing. These programs must focus on the ethical dimensions of teaching, sincerity in student mentoring, and responsible scholarship. Faculty appraisal should also include a statement of ethical conduct, and institutions should actively discourage unethical publication or score-maximizing practices.

7. Conclusion

While CAS remains a powerful tool to recognize academic merit, its implementation in Arunachal Pradesh reveals systemic weaknesses that dilute its intent. Unless policy execution is grounded in procedural clarity and ethical values, CAS risks becoming a bureaucratic burden rather than a motivational ladder. A reformed, transparent, and region-sensitive approach is needed to harness its full potential.

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