



IITians to get credits for strengthening grassroots democracy through RTI

Shubhlakshmi Shukla Posted online: Tuesday , Jan 05, 2010 at 0510 hrs

Ahmedabad : IIT-Gandhinagar will become the country's first institute to award credits to the students for initiatives in "strengthening democracy at the grassroots level" as part of the curriculum.

The idea, mooted and being piloted by Magsaysay award winner Sandeep Pandey, involves IIT students using the RTI Act to get democracy-strengthening information and putting it to use.

They will be motivated to participate in the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) programmes at the grassroots and conduct social audits in villages.

The students of IIT-Gn who will pass out in 2012 are currently taking part in the sessions taken by Pandey. "We have noticed that sophomores have their own ideas and they are not rigid. So we decided to introduce a credit course system. The students can opt for any area, whose duration would be eight-lecture hours — and this will carry one credit," said Sudhir Jain, the director of the institute.

"Around 50 students have opted for strengthening of democracy at the grassroots in India. Pandey himself would decide their credits," Jain added.

The credits will depend on the initiatives and the impact at the grassroots. They will do so by filing RTI applications or taking part in NREGA or conducting social audit," he said further.

Pandey said: "For the first time, an IIT has introduced this kind of system. We have divided the students into several groups. One group, for instance, will visit Chandna village of Kheda district. They will take up the work related to that village and based on that, we will further grade them."

He said many students have also opted for filing RTI applications. "They are given a specific time limit to submit it. Some have expressed interest in filing RTI queries regarding their own institute. The students have also started an anti-plastic exercise on the campus"

A student, Ajinkya Kulkarni, said, "After interacting with the local (Chandna) NGOs, we will train the villagers in filing RTI applications. Based on that, we will do a social audit before our semester ends."

Another student, Susmitha Purnima, said she wanted to do follow up

work on the Satyam scam.

"I will file an RTI on the issue within two days after consulting Pandey and other experts."