

When Continuous Assessment Becomes Credential Inflation

Rethinking the Examination Architecture for Non-Collegiate Students in Rajasthan

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The idea of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) was introduced with a clear pedagogical purpose: assessment should not be confined to a single terminal examination. Learning should be observed, assessed and supported continuously through classroom engagement, assignments, presentations, projects, internal examinations, practical work and other authentic academic activities. But what happens when the terminology of continuous assessment survives while its academic substance disappears? This question deserves urgent attention in the context of non-collegiate/private students in the higher-education system. Where a regular student is required to undergo a structured academic process involving attendance, classroom interaction, internal assessment and a terminal/end-semester examination, a non-collegiate student does not necessarily participate in the same continuous academic ecosystem. Yet, where a substantial internal-assessment component is subsequently awarded without equivalent evidence of continuous academic engagement, the very philosophy of continuous assessment comes under question.

The issue is not about denying educational opportunity to non-collegiate learners. Nor is it about questioning the legitimacy of flexible or alternative modes of learning. The issue is much more fundamental: Can marks be treated as evidence of learning when the academic processes that are supposed to generate those marks have not actually taken place?

From Continuous Assessment to Continuous Credential Inflation

Continuous assessment is meaningful only when there is continuous learning to assess. A regular student may receive 30 marks through internal assessment and 70 marks through a terminal examination. The internal component is expected to emerge from a range of academic engagements—class tests, assignments, presentations, seminars, projects, practical activities, attendance/participation and other documented learning experiences, depending upon the programme and applicable regulations.

The non-collegiate learner, by definition, follows a different academic route. If such a learner is assessed through the terminal examination but is simultaneously given an additional internal component without equivalent and verifiable academic engagement, the system risks creating a credential asymmetry. In simple terms, two students may receive the same degree, but the evidentiary basis on which their marks have been generated may not be comparable. This is where Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation can potentially degenerate into Continuous Credential Inflation. Credential inflation is not merely the multiplication of certificates. It occurs when the value of a credential becomes progressively detached from the demonstrated competence that the credential is supposed to certify.

The 70:30 Question

The commonly used 70:30 assessment architecture—70% external/end-semester examination and 30%/20% internal/continuous assessment—has a sound pedagogic rationale for regular students.

- The 70% terminal component provides a common summative benchmark.
- The 30 internal component provides space for formative assessment, classroom-based learning and continuous academic engagement.

The difficulty arises when the same numerical architecture is mechanically extended to a learner who has not undergone the corresponding continuous academic process. If 30 marks are to represent continuous assessment, the system must be able to answer a basic question: Continuous assessment of what continuous academic activity? If the answer is not supported by verifiable evidence, the 30 marks cease to function as assessment and begin to function as a credential supplement. That is an important distinction.

Assessment is Evidence, Not an Entitlement

Marks are not a welfare provision. They are an epistemic claim. When an institution awards 30/20 marks in internal assessment, it is effectively certifying that the learner has demonstrated a certain level of academic engagement or achievement through specified assessment instruments. Therefore, every mark must have an evidence trail. A genuine internal-assessment system should answer:

- What was assessed?
- Who assessed it?
- When was it assessed?
- Through which instrument?
- Against which rubric?
- What evidence was generated?
- How was moderation undertaken?
- Can the assessment be audited?

If these questions cannot be answered, the integrity of the internal-assessment component becomes difficult to defend.

The Problem is Larger Than Marks

This is not merely an examination issue. It is a question of academic credibility. When marks become easier to obtain than the learning they are supposed to represent, the entire Credential Economy is affected.

- Degrees become more numerous.
- Marks become less discriminating.
- Grade distributions become inflated.
- Competence becomes difficult to distinguish.
- Employers increasingly rely on external screening mechanisms.
- Students become more dependent on competitive examinations and coaching ecosystems.
- And universities gradually lose one of their most important social functions—the credible certification of knowledge and competence.

Thus, what appears to be a small procedural issue in internal assessment can ultimately contribute to a much larger phenomenon: **credential inflation without proportional competency inflation**.

Equity Does Not Mean Identical Treatment

There is, however, an important principle of educational equity. Non-collegiate students should not necessarily be subjected to exactly the same academic arrangements as regular students. Their mode of learning is different, and the system must accommodate legitimate alternative pathways. But equity does not mean identical treatment; it means equivalent academic standards. A non-collegiate learner may be assessed differently. But different assessment does not have to mean weaker assessment. If continuous classroom assessment is not feasible, universities could develop alternative mechanisms such as:

- supervised assignments,
- authenticated project work,
- viva voce,
- structured written assessments,
- digital portfolios,
- contact sessions,
- proctored assessments,
- oral examinations or other approved evidence-based instruments.

The objective should be equivalence of learning evidence, not artificial equivalence of marks.

The Integrity of the Degree

The degree awarded by a university is ultimately a public document of competence. Its credibility does not belong exclusively to the individual student or the university. It belongs to the wider social and professional ecosystem. An employer interprets a degree as evidence. A professional institution interprets it as evidence. Another university interprets it as evidence. Society interprets it as evidence.

Therefore, the university has a fundamental obligation to ensure that the assessment architecture behind the credential is academically defensible. If 30/20 internal marks are awarded, those marks must represent something real. If a student receives a high grade, the grade must have adequate discriminatory validity. If two students receive the same qualifications, the system should be able to demonstrate that both have crossed the minimum threshold of learning prescribed for that qualification.

The Regulatory Vacuum Must Not Become an Academic Vacuum

The rapid transition towards semesterisation, creditisation, multidisciplinary education and flexible learning under NEP 2020 makes this issue even more significant. The more flexible the higher-education system becomes, the stronger its assessment governance must be. Flexibility without accountability can produce ambiguity. Credit mobility without learning verification can produce credit accumulation without competence accumulation. Multiple pathways without common learning outcomes can produce credential fragmentation. Therefore, Rajasthan needs a clearly articulated framework for the academic assessment of non-collegiate learners across its higher-education ecosystem. Such a framework should specify:

- minimum learning evidence,
- assessment instruments,
- authentication mechanisms,
- moderation procedures,
- record retention,
- auditability,
- learning-outcome alignment,
- and equivalence of academic standards.

A Better Way Forward

The solution is not to abolish non-collegiate education. It is to reform its assessment architecture. The Higher Education Department and State Universities could consider a State-wide Academic Integrity and Assessment Framework under which every assessment component is linked to a demonstrable learning outcome. For regular students, the existing internal-assessment structure can continue wherever academically justified.

For non-collegiate students, universities could develop a separate but academically rigorous assessment mechanism rather than simply replicating the internal marks structure of regular students. Most importantly, no marks should be awarded merely because a particular percentage has been prescribed. Marks should follow evidence. Evidence should follow learning. And learning should follow clearly defined outcomes.

From Marks Distribution to Learning Validation

The real reform, therefore, is conceptual. We must move:

- from marks allocation to learning validation;
- from procedural compliance to academic evidence;
- from credential distribution to competency certification;
- from nominal continuous assessment to authentic continuous learning;
- and ultimately, from credential inflation to credential integrity.

Rajasthan has an opportunity to establish a robust model in this area. Its universities can demonstrate that flexible education need not mean diluted standards; that non-collegiate education need not mean non-academic education; and that alternative pathways can coexist with rigorous academic accountability. The objective should not be to make the examination system more difficult. It should be to make the credential more credible. For that, one principle should guide every assessment reform: Every mark must have an academic basis, every grade must have evidentiary validity, and every degree must carry demonstrable competence. Continuous assessment was conceived to make education more authentic. It should not become a mechanism for making credentials easier to obtain. The future of higher education depends not merely on expanding access to degrees, but on protecting the credibility of the learning those degrees represent.