

# Classroom to Patents:

## IPR in Today's Higher Education



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### Introduction

In this era of rapid technological transformation where, single idea can transform industries and redefine the future, understanding Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) has become far more significant than mere a legal requirement. This is now a driving force behind academic excellence, innovation, and national growth of any country. Intellectual Property (IP) refers to creations of the mind that hold commercial, artistic, or technological value. The legal rights granted to protect these creations are known as Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). As the global economy becomes increasingly knowledge-driven, ideas have emerged as a nation's most powerful asset. Innovation is now no longer limited to industries or research laboratories, the higher education institutes (HEIs) become key space where creativity, technology, and entrepreneurship converge. Today, universities and colleges are not only emerging as vibrant hubs nurturing original thinking and technological advancement but also prompting startups and entrepreneurship.

Yet despite this growing significance, many researchers and students remain unaware of how to protect or commercialize their creations. This gap highlights the urgent need for strong institutional IPR frameworks and widespread IPR literacy across campuses. Recognizing these challenges, the Government of India introduced the National IPR Policy, 2016, aimed at strengthening innovation culture, safeguarding creative works, and enhancing the nation's

intellectual capital. Institutional IPR policies play a similar role at the university level, they outline how IP generated within the campus is created, owned, protected, and commercialized. A well-designed IPR policy builds ethical research practices, promotes start-ups, and encourages fruitful industry-academia collaborations. Hence, IPR awareness is becoming essential component in HEIs today. Additionally new education policy (NEP) 2020 also emphasizes on the need to introduce skills and innovation-based courses and practices to make education more powerful.

Some important aspects, such as, the drivers that make IPR education necessary, the impact of IPR policies, existing gaps, and key reforms for strengthening India's IPR ecosystem within higher education have been discussed here.

### Knowledge of IPRs in HEIs

IPRs have become fundamental for national development as they protect ideas and encourage innovation in competitive global markets. HEIs play an important role in generating new knowledge, conducting research, and developing transformative technologies. To address the pressing challenges related to protection, commercialization, and ethical use of innovations, India's National IPR Policy 2016 outlined several objectives relevant for HEIs. India's vision of "**Creative India; Innovative India**" underscores the nation's long-standing tradition of ingenuity. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a pivotal role in nurturing young innovators, and a

well-defined Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) policy is central to this mission. A structured IPR framework not only provides legal clarity and incentives for creators but also ensures that their ideas can mature into impactful innovations. In a globally connected economy, India's commitments to WTO and other international agreements demand that our students and researchers understand global IPR norms.

By integrating IPR education and institutional policies, HEIs prepare their communities to compete and collaborate on the world stage. Strong IPR environments also attract foreign investment, particularly in knowledge-centric sectors like biotechnology, IT, pharmaceuticals, and engineering. Institutions with transparent IPR rules cultivate confidence among investors, encourage research partnerships, and promote technology driven projects. Equally important is the responsibility to serve public interest. While safeguarding creators' rights, HEIs must ensure that innovations with social impact such as essential medicines or public-health technologies remain accessible and equitable. Balanced IPR frameworks help maintain this delicate ethical equilibrium. Finally, a robust IPR ecosystem is a catalyst for entrepreneurship. Clear regulations enable start-ups, spin-offs, and campus-based enterprises to grow with confidence, contributing to national economic development.

In essence, well-crafted IPR policies empower HEIs to become vibrant hubs of creativity, innovation, and industry collaboration. As more institutions adopt such policies, the benefits ranging from stronger research outputs to enhanced investment continue to strengthen India's innovation landscape.

### **Benefits of IPR Policies in HEIs**

IPR policies established by HEIs offer many advantages that strengthen both individual and institutional growth. They protect creators from exploitation and unethical use of their work, while motivating faculty and researchers by ensuring proper recognition and rewards for their innovations. Such policies also generate economic value through patents, copyrights, licensing, and technology transfer, attracting external funding and industry collaborations. As a result, institutions experience improved rankings and global reputation, supported by an ethical culture that respects intellectual contributions. Moreover, strong IPR frameworks enhance institutional capacity by developing skilled personnel and nurturing a robust innovation ecosystem. These efforts further open doors to international partnerships, enabling HEIs to actively participate in global research and intellectual property networks.

### **Impact of IPR Policies in HEIs**

The introduction of IPR policies across universities has significantly contributed to strengthening India's innovation landscape. These policies have improved the country's global perception by showcasing India as a creative, research-oriented, and innovation-driven nation. Stronger IP protection has also boosted foreign investment, as investors now view Indian institutions as reliable partners for technology development and collaboration. Moreover, the systematic adoption of IPR frameworks has enabled India to align more closely with international standards, ensuring compliance with global commitments and obligations in the field of intellectual property.

### **Gaps in Current IPR Policies in HEIs**

Despite these advantages, the institutional IPR policies in many universities still face significant gaps that hinder their effective implementation. Key terms such as “fair use” often remain unclear, creating confusion among students, researchers, and faculty. Protection for traditional knowledge and cultural heritage is also insufficient, leaving indigenous communities vulnerable to misappropriation. Weak enforcement mechanisms further allow infringement and piracy to persist.

In many cases, the absence of clear guidelines on compulsory licensing affects public access to essential innovations, particularly in health and education. Limited financial and human resources also constrain institutions from executing their IPR policies efficiently. Moreover, public interest considerations are not always adequately addressed, and stakeholder engagement with government bodies, industry, SMEs, and civil society remains limited, reducing the overall impact of these policies. These gaps must be addressed to strengthen the IPR ecosystem within HEIs.

### **Recommendations for Strengthening IPR Policies in HEIs**

To create a robust and effective IPR regime in India, HEIs must adopt comprehensive and flexible IPR policies that clearly outline ownership rights, benefit sharing, disclosure norms, licensing procedures, and commercialization pathways. Establishing dedicated IPR Cells or Technology Transfer Offices staffed with trained legal and technical experts is essential for managing patent filing, licensing, and technology transfer. Equally important is expanding institutional awareness through workshops, seminars, and curriculum integration,

supported by adequate financial and infrastructural resources. Financial incentives for patent filing and rewards for innovation can further motivate faculty and researchers. Strong collaborations with industry, government, and international bodies enhance joint R&D and commercialization prospects, while robust technology transfer support helps incubate start-ups and spin-offs. Transparency must be ensured through regularly updated policies and databases accessible on institutional websites, complemented by IPR-focused publications that showcase achievements and global trends. Finally, administrative processes should be streamlined to eliminate delays, improve coordination, and provide timely assistance, enabling a more efficient and innovation-driven IPR environment across HEIs

### **Conclusion**

A strong IPR culture within HEIs is no longer optional but it is essential for national progress in a global knowledge economy. When implemented effectively, institutional IPR policies encourage innovation, protect creator rights, support entrepreneurship, and attract global investment. Strengthening these policies through comprehensive frameworks, awareness initiatives, financial incentives, and collaborative networks can help India build a world-class innovation ecosystem. By bridging existing gaps and empowering HEIs, the country can unlock its full creative potential and ensure that classrooms become catalysts for patents, progress, and long-term economic growth.

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