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THE FIFTH ESTATE

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A Note to Freshers

And once again it is that time of the year; the campus is brimming with new students and their parental entourage. IIT, after years of toil! New IITians are on the footsteps of college life, a pivotal point in developing their persona and valuable skill-sets. For now most of you must be adjusting to a different lifestyle and a sudden new-found freedom with an array of (un)welcome changes. A sad necessity is leaving comforts of your family and staying in undersized lodgings, saying hello to messes that - lets put it lightly - do not tickle your tastebuds.

A tricky predicament, this, as many of us remember it. And the first resource one finds here to remedy homesickness are wingmates. More often than not they're a motley crew of ten people who belong to different schools of thought - apart from leading to a lot of fun conversations,

this starts a kind of evolution in you. On adjusting to the styles of your peers, you can learn more things from them than you will ever learn from lectures. Great peers are one of the best assets of an IITian's life.

A whole book could be written on the touchy subject of academics, with different people advising different things. We forgo endorsing anything here except a modicum of effort, but you would already know that activities other than studies are equally important. What are four years in IITM if you haven't learnt how to play a sport or a musical instrument, or took never part in a single inter-hostel event? No one has hitherto accomplished that, so we don't really know. Many now-seniors have ended up doing all of the above mentioned and more - and they're very happy they did.

Rumours you have heard that the course of study in institute can be demanding is, we regret to say, true. If you don't keep a healthy mind, you can get depressed and frustrated. The GCU is here for a reason; and good counselling can bring you back on a positive track only if you're willing to let them help.

That is still secondary. Good friends are your primary defence against hopelessness, like good peers are against lethargy. We urge you to find both before you settle down into some living pattern, as you are bound to, and stay that way for the next four or five years.

Shaastra Curtain Raiser

Dear freshperson,

Apologies on the usage of the term, but one cannot afford to be sexist these days. I hope this letter finds you in the pink of health and spirit. IIT is exciting - you must be seeing new things everyday. Like Shaastra, for instance.

What is Shaastra, anyway? Shaastra is the annual technical festival of IIT Madras. It is held over five days around the weekend near Gandhi Jayanti. The days of Shaastra are numbered from zero i.e., the first day is Day 0 and the last Day 4. You'd find that most events take place from Day 1 onwards, and these days are institute holidays.

Of course, Shaastra isn't simply a convenient timeframe for a quick trip home. It is a technological delight; there are over 65 events and workshops spread across diverse fields of science and engineering this year, plus three professional shows in the line-up, and there is something for every taste. There will be - in person or by VC - experts from across the globe talking about the latest in technology, economics and entrepreneurship; previous speakers include Lyndon Evans, Vinod Khosla and Mark Weinberg. And more importantly, there are lakhs of prize money to be won. This figure, of course, refers to the grand total of all prizes winnable.

Shaastra events hold a great reputation for class. Our robotics is one of the toughest of its kind. The Shaastra Main Quiz or SMQ (get familiar with abbreviations; they'll come in handy.) is the premier tech quiz in India. The Online Programming Contest (OPC) has participation from across the globe. (And notably, several winners from outside the country too.) There are events involving every branch of scientific knowledge. Some problem statements, with liberal utilization of the alphabet, may make you

wonder if they are written in Greek. Then there are events like Project X, mother of all hands-on activities, wherein you build something using everyday objects like pencils and ice cream sticks - traditionally a fresher-friendly enterprise. There are plenty of workshops to explore around - Android development, ethical hacking, fossils (indeed, the dig-em-up type) and so many more. While I can go on and on in this fashion, there's more to the story than these details.

Shaastra is a marvel in many levels. It is a completely voluntary, completely student-run fest - whether it is about setting up stalls, maintaining industry relations (with several prominent MNCs), designing a site that receives 13 millions hits every year or publicizing Shaastra all over the country. It has an ISO 9001:2008 certification, in view of the excellent implementation of quality management systems. It is the only fest to be awarded with it, which is certainly exemplary. All this contributes to a 60 lakh budgeted festival managed by students motivated by pure passion. (Passion for? Can't tell - food coupons seems like a good bet.) This is summed up by its logo, the dice, with their asymmetric replication of number two on each face, which commemorates what Einstein once said, "God does not play dice with the universe." (This was during his rebuttal of Quantum Mechanics, a field of Physics without which the electronics revolution would not have happened.)

Come, watch us inspire the future!



SHAASTRA 2011

A Loud Silent March

Report of the silent demonstration that took place on August 17th.

Following Anna Hazare's arrest on August 16th, the Indian public has been in upheaval over the issue of a stronger Lokpal bill. The youth have notably taken to this issue in a big way, organising protest marches and staging dharnas, forcing members of the general public to sit up and take notice. The student community in IIT Madras, not to be left behind, organised a spontaneous 'silent march' on August 17th which saw participation from well over a thousand students. Together with the undergraduates, several post graduates and research scholars turned up in large numbers to protest against recent government actions.

"...an exchange student from Germany, acknowledged that corruption and poverty are the two major problems that India faces and would gladly be a part of any campaign to eradicate them."

It was a large gathering that assembled at Gajendra Circle – it appeared that a silent march was an unlikely possibility, with slogans being raised vehemently right from the start. The assemblage embarked on a 6km long trek to the entrance and back after which a candle lighting ceremony was organised at the stadium. Though very few were actually aware of the differences between the Lokpal and the Jan Lokpal, everyone joined in for a reason. While Deepak Sahoo did not want to miss out on being a part of what could grow into the biggest post-independence revolution, Sujeet Gholap was doing it for Anna Hazare. "I trust him, he's the people's hero in this movement and I know what he's doing is right," he said. Florian, an exchange student from Germany, acknowledged that corruption and poverty are the two major problems that India faces and would gladly be a part of any campaign to eradicate them.

While students were more enthusiastic about voicing their opinions on the issue, the faculty were more reserved in their stand. It is said that In India, both charity and corruption begin at home, and Prof. Bhaskar Ramamurthi reinforced this view: "... Such a march is good for the people who are do-

ing it. A major component of the movement against corruption is about looking into ourselves, rather than blaming some 'they' responsible for the problems we are facing."

With the intellectual community pitching in and doing their bit, the march received coverage in leading dailies, probably justifying that it had some impact. However, regardless of whether such an event made a difference at all at the national level, the participants were clear that this wasn't a one day protest. The demonstration at some level also represented the corruption and inefficiencies that we, as students, face in our day to day lives.

One issue highlighted by Abhishek, a dual degree student, was the presence of India Against Corruption, a registered civil society organisation, using IIT Madras as a platform to display banners and carry out a protest themselves. He argued that on the same lines, women's rights groups and other NGOs should also be allowed to stage demonstrations within the campus. This is a question that the administration will have to tackle.

Are Anna Hazare and 'civil society' right in taking the law into their own hands through such marches and protests? Does Team Anna actually represent the views of the majority in this country? Or has the entire parliamentary system itself become so corrupt that change simply has to come from elsewhere? These hard-hitting questions will be answered over the coming months.



Dean Students Parting Address



On 22nd August, the Dean of Students Prof. Govardhan, who will shortly be leaving office, addressed the Hostel Wardens, members of the GCU, Hostel Council and regarding various issues regarding the institute. He was assisted in his talk by CCW Prof. Maiyya and GCU Head Prof G Srinivasan.

The spotlight was placed on problems pertaining to mess facilities in the institute. In this regard, the Dean assured that complaints regarding the current mess caterer, A-Diet express, is being considered severely and will be resolved as soon as possible. He also explained how the mess tender works and shed light on the procedure that led to A-Diet's selection. Prof. Maiyya added to this by stating that if students come up with a strong demand and assure a registration in the numbers of 1000 or more, he was open to the idea of running messes with a different menu.

"...the Dean assured that complaints regarding the current mess caterer, A-Diet express, is being considered severely and will be resolved as soon as possible."

The Dean also expressed his deep concern about the recent accommodation crisis, saying that it won't be long before the current population of about 7000 will go up to about 8500. He revealed plans to have either Sindhu or Cauvery hostel to be converted to a hostel for girls. Until then, he requested cooperation from the student community.

The Dean expressed commiseration for the series of suicides that have taken place in the institute over the past year. In order to avoid such misfortunes in the future, he said that a 24/7 Tele Counselling Unit (with a toll free number) will be introduced to guide students and help them overcome stress and depression related problems. This

Unit has been outsourced to a private company called MEDALL, run by reliable professionals with help being just a phone call away. This is likely to start in the month of September and students will have to register for the use of this service. Prof GS said that the contract was approved after good research and assured of the professional expertise of the company.

"All of you shouldn't take bath every day!" he joked blithely, saying that the file for Solar Water Heating facility in all Hostels has been cleared and the ₹4 crore-project would commence shortly. He also said that around 40 lakhs of funds have been channelized towards improving and introducing state-of-the art facilities in the hockey and football stadiums.

He said that a number of professors in the institute were in not in favour of Shaastra and Saarang being conducted during the semester as opposed to during vacations. On the face of it, the problem was apparently with the distractions the latter were inflicting on the students and also with the unnecessary number of holidays they demanded. Considering this issue, he said they were working on shifting either of the festivals to the winter vacation. The students were asked to come up with suggestions and prepare their case in favour or against this motion and present to the administration.

After expressing emphasis on personal safety, the Dean talked about starting a Student Welfare Fund, wherein the caution amount of ₹1500 deposited by every student while joining the hostels will be used to give medical and other assistance upto 1~1.5 lakhs for students. He also mentioned that the Assistant Warden's room in hostels and the Warden's quarters behind Himalaya would be converted to guest rooms for parents of students in medical emergency, at nominal rates.

In his concluding words he thanked students, advisors, and the hostel management for all the support that he got from them and wished them a good luck for the future.

T5E wishes Prof. Govardhan the best of luck in his future ventures.

SAC Meeting Review

A brief summary of the SAC Meeting that took place on August 17th.

Baranidaran, the Students General Secretary, enlisted some work that was accomplished over the summer, such as insurance policy overhaul and GCU Orientations. In an effort to bring through a plan to maintain shared bicycles in campus, he mentioned that he had approached the NSS to collect unused bicycles from various hostels. With regard to the recent deaths, he proposed hiring 3 of the best counsellors in the country whose services the institute could avail with amounts to the tune of 2 Lakh rupees. Another initiative put forth was the creation of a Student Welfare Fund to help out those students to whom MCM does not apply.

The Hostel Affairs Secretary Somesh spoke about the circumstances in which A-Diet was awarded their contract. He attributed the irregularities in food quality to the lack of kitchen equipment and noted that the food standards rose with the advent of this equipment. He refuted the possibility of raising the price from Rs.50 with the aim of improving the food by citing the stringency of protocol. Other points raised included implementing industrial washing machines and soon-to-be-installed vending machines.

Sivateja, the Sports Secretary, spoke that expected facilities in the offing were lights in the Hockey and Football fields and a new Squash court which would cost more than 55 Lakhs. Sporting events this semester include the Terry-Fox run, Freshie Schroeter and Sports Fest. Chess has been scrapped from Inter-IIT and has been replaced by Girls' Volleyball.

The Cultural Affairs Secretaries announced that the media club will now be under the Cul-Sec and will host a Chennai-wide SFM and photography contest in the near future. The rest of the institute clubs would be funded from this year and would have a more formal structure. The Lit-Soc calendar has been pushed beyond Quiz-1. Following them, Ms. Ranjini Balan spoke on the need for a Female Security Committee owing to the harassment incidents that have occurred in the past.

The Research Affairs Secretary noted the unfortunate lack of procedural information in the institute. He announced plans for a graduate handbook to address this. Other proposals included a digital, less cumbersome Academic calendar and a research counterpart to CFI. The Academic Affairs Secretary spoke about Research-Park Internship Drives for the benefit of 1st and 2nd years and the need for more concrete Placement rules. He had commissioned the creation of a structured database to ensure that implementation strategy from the current Placement-Team would be passed on to the next. He claimed that the construction of Campus-Connect – a portal in which one could communicate with recently graduated alumni – had stopped midway due to Web-Ops related issues.

Nitish Garg, The SAC Speaker, proposed the concept of a Student Honor Code. This code will be drafted by the students and is supposed to come into existence by the end of this academic year.

Independence Day Celebrations

A programme commemorating India's 64th anniversary of Independence was held beside the IITM administrative block at 8am. The large gathering of students and faculty were addressed by the Officiating Director of the Institute of the institute, Prof. V.G. Idichandy, in a speech that paid homage to the heroes of the National Movement. Prof. Idichandy overviewed India's economic and social evolution, a process that spanned from the optimistic visions of Nehru, through stagnation and emergency under Indira Gandhi, upto the economic reforms and liberalization initiated during the term of

Narasimha Rao. He reminded the audience of the pivotal role played by the IITs in the promotion of science and technology in the country during the past decades.

The address was followed by renditions of patriotic songs by students and faculty members, which was comprised of solos accompanied by instruments and choir songs in several Indian languages. Prof. L S Ganesh, who coordinated this musical event, observed that participation this year had been particularly enthusiastic.



Prakriti

This article has been compiled with inputs from Prof. Susy Varghese, a nature lover and one of the pioneers of Prakriti, the wildlife conservation organization in the institute.

The IIT campus was carved out of land from the Guindy reserve forest in the 50's. It is home to a number of flora and fauna living in distinct eco systems, such as open grasslands, wetlands thick forest patches and patches of scrub jungle. The main inhabitants of these ecosystems are the blackbuck, spotted deer, jackals, mongoose, monkeys, squirrels, toddy cats, wild cats, various types of reptiles, a plethora of insects including more than 50 different species of butterflies and about 100 species of birds.

Prakriti is a group of enthusiastic individuals, consisting of faculty members, staff, alumni and students, who have taken it upon themselves to protect the IIT Madras eco system from rapid urbanization and population growth. They chose a common identity, Prakriti, in 2002 to streamline their activities and create greater awareness about the wildlife conservation. They have monthly meetings and also organize forest walks for a one-to-one with nature in line with their motto - "Observe, appreciate, and conserve".

Prakriti is assisted by Mr. Muruganandam, who is a trained animal rescue expert and is currently employed by the institute to look after the flora and fauna in the campus. His presence has greatly helped them, says Prof. Susy, as she has been kept awake on countless occasions because of phone calls regarding animal emergencies. At times, Prakriti members had to rush to rescue animals in distress in the field well past midnight. They also work in tandem with Blue Cross and the Forest Dept. and seek their help in a number of matters.

One of the main aims of Prakriti is to create awareness about the dangers that our simple acts pose to the environment. A lot of deer have died due to their hooves getting stuck in circular objects. These could be anything ranging from pipes, wires, plumbing debris etc. A little cautiousness on our part could go a long way in saving animal life.

A little known fact is that the black buck is also a Schedule 1 animal, just like the Tiger and the Asiatic Elephant. Prakriti volunteers have been regularly patrolling at nights to prevent dog attacks and keep a track of any harm to the animals. It is due to their efforts that the black buck population in the institute has increased. These are very important numbers as IITM constitutes one of the very few existing black buck habitats in the country. Their efforts directly affect the national consensus.

Prakriti has also helped in bringing awareness about the need to protect the remaining wildlife of IITM campus through persistent interventions in policy making which could affect the campus ecology. The membership of Prakriti is open to all IITM fraternity. To join, just send an email to prakriti@iitm.ac.in.



T5E salutes the efforts made by Prof Varghese and the whole Prakriti team and hope they are successful in all their endeavours. We also urge the student community to be more cautious of their acts such as throwing garbage in the forest area, intentionally scaring the animals, giving food to them etc. A small step from our side can go a long way to protect the beauty of the campus.

Internship Experiences

This is August, the one month every freshie secretly wishes to fly by. If you are a second-year, you spend it in rewarding yourself on your first 3 months away from the insti. If you are neither of these, chances are that you spend your evenings rummaging through every mail your branch councillor sends you. Yes, the season of internships is upon us. Having been proclaimed as one of the best engineers of the country, some of our fellow students have bagged many enviable internship positions. Here are some of their experiences.

Harvard Medical School, Boston

Harvard, unlike other universities has no international program for interns. So, to get in, finding a professor in the field of interest is necessary. It would be useful to portray oneself as unique with a skill that is necessary for the program when contacting the professor. Muski [2012/BT/BT] worked on ion channels at the Boston Children's Hospital. He asserts that the work conditions are splendid. Needless to say, an internship at Harvard goes a long way and if pursuing a PhD is an option, nothing can top this.

Schlumberger, Ahmedabad

Schlumberger is an oilfield services company. They employ a rigorous selection procedure consisting of a shortlisting based on CV, a group discussion on a topic intentionally left vague and the dreaded interview. The work being physically demanding, they prefer fit people. The applicant must be wary; for the work requires lifting and painting pipes under the hot sun. Pojo [2012/BT/EP] insists that he gained an in-depth technical understanding though.

Volvo Aero, Bangalore

Volvo had approached the Mech Department scouting for interns. Raju [2012/BT/ME] with the highest CGPA, was readily selected by the department. Contrary to what one might imagine, Volvo Aero has a rather small office in Bangalore with 22 employees. In the six weeks that Raju worked there, he ended up programming more than 'real' engineering.

Microsoft Research, Bangalore

MSR has 7 different groups doing independent research. They come looking for interns during

the first week of September. Akshaya [2012/BT/CS] worked 2 weeks in December and another 12 weeks in the summer in the Advanced Development Group. She suggests that the applicant must make sure that the group that calls him for an interview is the group he is interested in. If not, he might end up doing a marathon research intern in something unappealing to him.

Texas Instruments, Bangalore

TI too has a rigorous selection procedure which includes a test followed by a technical interview and an HR interview. Getting an intern at TI through a contact is easier. With no fixed hours, 20K a month pay and a fabulous campus, it sure looks golden. Sidharth [2013/DD/EE], a VLSI nine pointer, believes that "the work isn't anything you can't handle".

University of Ruhr, Germany

The lucky few who get selected through DAAD get a Schengen visa which makes unobstructed travel across Europe possible (the stipend is sufficient for this). Also, the usual visa processing hassles are spared. To get selected, one needs an invite from a German professor (an astronomic CGPA comes in handy). Nag [2012/BT/MM] worked at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Materials Simulation. He says that the research environment there is very lively - something that is hard to find in India.

IISc, Bangalore

A project in IISc gives you the taste of a research career. The applicant might even walk away with a recommendation letter and a paper to his name, both of which may come in handy while applying for higher education. Midhun [2012/BT/EP] worked on thin films in the Instrumentation department. Though he found his own project engaging and rewarding, he warns that many of the projects in IISc are coding based and not science oriented.

HUL, Mumbai

HUL is the biggest FMCG supply chain in India. The work conditions are excellent but the interns have to expect a lot of travel on the cards. The work demands a muster of all of one's skills - be it academic or interpersonal or conversational. The selection procedure is the usual three tier act of application, group discussion and interview. Sushmita [2012/BT/CH], an intern at HUL, says that CGPA at

the end of the 4th semester is a deciding factor in the selection process.

PwC, Bangalore

PricewaterhouseCoopers is one of the four biggest accounting firms. Having a contact within the company and a decent resume will earn an interview. The job itself is basically a desk job where

one has to work on a laptop screen in formal attire for a major portion of the day. The work involves finance, taxation, entity structuring, governance and outsourcing to name a few. The work atmosphere is great and the compensation includes many perks. Prashanth [2012/BT/ME] recalls that the work was ridden with deadlines and dull interludes.

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Follow the link <http://tinyurl.com/t5e-intern> for an in-depth report on experiences of IITM students during their internships.
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The Speed Gun

We're all familiar with the speed display device located on the road outside the Electrical Sciences Block. The aptly christened "Speed Gun" is the brainchild of Electrical Engineering whiz Ananda Narayana [2011/BT/EE] to bring to task erring speedsters and motorists.

The sylvan environment that we cohabit with the graceful deer, the timid black buck and the pesky monkey has often been a mute witness to the "accidental" hit and run. Unaccustomed to vehicles, many of these beautiful creatures have ended up under the wheels. The meandering roads, the blind turns and the thick foliage are safe neither for the leisurely cyclist nor for the hurrying pedestrian. The speeding issues have been a cause of growing concern with the Institute imposing strict rules to bring down speeding limits to as low as 20 kmph. However, ensuring smooth and continual speed monitoring has a number of difficulties, and this is where Ananda's Speed Gun comes in.

The Speed Gun consists of a set of sensors installed on the two-lane road margin which calculates a vehicle's speed as it passes by. Laser LEDs act as optical trip wires and trigger speed detection. A digital board erected 200 feet down the road displays the speed and an alarm goes off if the speed is above 40 kmph. The motorist is given a reaction time of three seconds to reduce speed. A camera can also be installed with the device to log violations by capturing the number plate. This data can be sent to the Central Security Office via Wi-Fi and

errant drivers can be caught at the gate.

The common radar guns cost \$ 500 per device. Besides, a security guard must be present at all times to use them. Radar guns can also be inaccurate as they rely heavily on the angle of attack. On the contrary, a prototype of Ananda's speed gun costs only Rs.2000. Also, his system could be very effective in school zones and for night time speed monitoring.

To such initiatives we say God bless and God-speed!



Academic freedom for students at IIT Madras

This article was composed by Vinay Hegde [2011/BT/MM], an ex-T5E Correspondent.

Ever wondered what academic freedom is available for the students of different departments, here at IIT Madras? Well, we at T5E did. We noticed that one of the goals enlisted in the IIT Madras Mission is to 'engage in trans-disciplinary research'. We set out to find out how much of this vision is actually implemented, and at what levels.

We talked to Prof. P Sriram, HoD of the department of Aerospace Engineering, touted as one of the most flexible departments in the institute. We started off with the common trouble students face in taking courses from other departments for credit (apart from the two free electives in place). He was quick to point out a clause in the B.Tech Guidelines (paraphrased): students can be allowed to credit up to two courses in other departments if they are necessary towards the fulfillment of the B.Tech project. Dual Degree students don't have this liberty because the M.Tech curriculum is extremely flexible and they can avail this freedom in their last two years anyway. The provision for B.Techs has been made by the Aero department whereas the M.Tech regulations is in place in most (not all) departments. Much depends on your ability to convince your faculty advisor or your HoD about the usefulness of the courses you want to take.

About the industrial 'interns', the academic guidelines are far less flexible. He pointed out that they are titled 'industrial training' which means the objective is to expose the students to the state of the Indian industry related to the respective departments. So, work in a purely academic institution defeats the stated purpose. The final prerogative in this regard usually resides with the department. Regarding Aero department in specific, due to the paucity of aerospace industries in the country (which may not be a valid argument for other departments like, say, Elec or Mech), interns are allowed in institutions that do not have the power to grant an academic degree. Each decision is taken on a case-to-case basis, of course, he confirmed.

The guidelines for BTPs are far less clear and the

process relatively more complicated. While many departments allow students to take up a BTP under a professor in a related department (Aero even allows professors from other academic institutions like IISc and JNCASR!), they require a professor in the department to be assigned as a co-guide to coordinate and monitor progress. Here too, each decision is taken on a case-to-case basis (based on the student's future interests, etc.), by the department. He pointed out that there are several issues to be handled in case of such BTPs: Arranging for an external examiner for the viva, coordinating paper work between the two guides and assuring a good number of students for the professors of the native department. Large departments, he noticed, have logistical issues too. They have a responsibility of ensuring uniform allocation of resources (human and instrumental) across all the faculty members (and thus various sub-branches) in the department. When asked about smaller-yet-rigid departments like MME, he said that they 'may be they are protecting their own turfs'. Since the number of PhD students, M.Tech students and B.Tech students groomed is also a factor in faculty promotions, the behaviour is understandable, he opined.

When we probed into the levels at which all these were implemented, he said that the Senate has given most of the administrative prerogative in these aspects to the departments themselves. He also observed that the behaviour of various departments changed with change in their demography, some drastically and some not so much.

When some other popularly-non-flexible departments like MME and Mech were contacted, the response was surprisingly poor and gruff answers like 'These are issues of the department' were encountered. Nonetheless, it was pleasantly surprising to find out that considerable academic freedom is available to students across all departments in pursuing areas of their interest during the course of their stay in the institute. Though much of the final say rests with the departments, initiatives from the students are what matter in most cases.

T5E Interview: *Vaishnavi Srivathsan*



Vaishnavi Srivathsan of the first ever batch of the Integrated M.A. [Economics] program recently became the first student from IITM to gain admission into Harvard Business School's prestigious 2+2 program. Excerpts from an e-interview with T5E on the awesome crack.

["Tribute to T5E Editors: I have taken more time to write answers to these questions than to the essay questions in my HBS application :P" – VS]

T5E: Tell us a little bit about your journey to the HBS 2+2 program.

V.S.: HBS 2+2 is an exciting route to enter the world of business school and build a professional career thereon. I heard of the 2+2 program early on but did not think about it till my eighth semester, as I was discussing my options upon graduation. As I had taken over as MABC, I was thinking for the program and I decided to give it a shot. I managed a decent score in GRE with three weeks of fight and a little bit of coaxing from pass-outs. I had exactly a couple of weeks after that for writing my essay questions and wrapping up recommendations and other stuff. I slogged off writing those essays and submitted them 4 hours before the deadline. My recommendation went in an hour before the deadline. Massive tensions mounted up – but in retrospect it was worth the effort. Writing those essays made me think a lot more about my interests, goals and in the process, I did realize that HBS was something that suited what I really wanted to do in life. With that certainty in mind, I pressed the submit button and shut myself off for the next month.

July 10, 2010. Director Leopold, from the HBS MBA program, announces on the blog that the results are due on 19th. All cocoons broke loose and butterflies flew.

July 19, 2010. At 7.30, there was an e-mail from HBS. I anticipated the contents of the email to include one of those nice things about how awesome I am, but this is not what they are currently looking for blah blah... so I was quite surprised to be invited to interview at HBS. Woo! The fun.

It so happened that I was invited to attend a seminar on "Liberty and Law" around the same time at Boston and I chose interview dates that coincided with the same. [If any admin is reading this, my stay at Boston was so crammed thanks to the 85% attendance rule.] I still remember the day very vividly in my mind, as I embarked on my flight to Boston. I had prepared the least bit for my HBS interview (barring a few calls with B-school alumni) and was quite nervous about cracking it. There was so much hope and expectation back at home, that I decided to keep a low profile about it at insti.

August 21, 2010. As I moved from my Marriott room in Kendall (MIT boys, take notes) to the HBS section, I was thrilled more than anything else to be on the biggest campus any B-school has ever had. A sprawling campus, matching the greenery at IITM, it felt like a dream school in all its entirety. As I headed over to the admin block, I was asked to dine with other applicants – that was a tremendously nerve-wracking experience. (Why would you want to walk in to 30 other people, who are probably better than you and have so much more to say, especially 10 minutes before your interview?) Nevertheless, I made some good friends there and it was a memorable experience eating salad, in the most hurried fashion EVER. The interview went very rapidly. I had an amazing interviewer in an alum from the school, who also happened to be an economics major, done some non-profit work and moved onto working at the very school. We shared a really good rapport and things were very smooth. After the interview, he told me I should expect to hear back around September 1st and offered a guided tour around the campus.

A quick fast forward from there and I was back in campus, attending classes and business, as usual. The next ring came exactly on September 1st, when I least expected – an email from HBS saying decisions are going to be released at noon (Boston time – fyi, 9PM our time). Taking confidence in just my dad, we let God do his miracle from there. At 9PM, the traffic was so heavy that we couldn't view my result. I was a bit too emo to handle it at that point of time, that I made my lucky dad check it on the desktop (there's a history behind checking it on the desktop). And, the only thing I heard my dad say was "We believe you've found your seat." And, that

was the beginning of a new journey. For the next few hours, my cellphone bill rocketed upto a couple of thousand bucks.

T5E: How did your time in IITM, specifically, contribute to your getting into this prestigious program? What were the things you think you did right?

V.S.: I believe that the very reason that I got a fighting chance at the 2+2 program was my admission to IIT and the time I spent here. Insti throws open a number of opportunities one wouldn't even imagine. I can say with some confidence, that I did take on a few challenges in insti life and that put me on a ladder that could stretch me to HBS. Pro-show coordship, Placement fight (BC-ship), working with top-notch economists, GCU stuff, Shaastra and Saarang experiences, the MITACS summer getaway and many things could be added onto that list.

T5E: Is there anything you wish you could have done differently?

V.S.: I would have probably taken a few more shots at doing some different things. I wish I had given some more time to lit-soc and been less of a muggle in my first couple of years :)

T5E: What are the things they don't tell you about the 2+2 upfront that prospective applicants might want to keep in mind while applying?

V.S.: HBS is a very impressive school and they believe that every student who attends school there is a potential leader. Keeping that in mind, they look for three qualities (specifically for the 2+2 candidates) : intellectual growth (CGPA in our case + GRE/GMAT scores) which proves that you will be able to handle the rigorous coursework, leadership credentials, to showcase your potential in creating change in the world and community citizenship to show that you have the society at large in mind while taking decisions.

The reason why the Indians who have been admitted to this program are mostly IITians is the fact that you crack JEE/HSEE – so you should be smart and Shaastra/Saarang and other avenues offer platforms to showcase leadership potential. Make use of all these things. CGPA is a definite plus for the 2+2 applicants – most of them are 9-pointers, as far as I know. Your essay answers, GRE/GMAT scores plus your recommendations matter. Having one recom-

mendation from a Harvard Alum is a plus. Build your leadership potential in the true sense of the term (you don't need to be a core/sec, just create impact in whatever you do). If you want to make money through working in Goldman Sachs, don't apply. They are looking for someone who want to get into different sorts of professions and broaden the impact of the school. Start-up experience is very valuable.

T5E: Students applying to B-schools tend to be specifically terrified of SOPs and interviews. Any thoughts/advice regarding the same?

V.S.: If you're terrified of interviews, go for MS, not an MBA. MBA is all about talking and writing, about the way you think and act, what you do. You'll have to write twice as much for an MBA app than for a PhD/MS app. Prepare yourself for that. Build solid work-ex (just not consulting/finance – any field would work) and give your GMAT early just in case you have to write it again earlier; maintain good contact with your ex-employers and network well. In order to paint an accurate picture of yourself, examine all that you have done and try to be as honest in your application as possible. Even if you failed, be truthful – it pays off in the long run. Try to introspect about your decision-making and execution skills as well as your ambitions in life. There is no particular profile B-schools look for – diversity is a plus – so if you do something off-beat, your chance is better! :D A desirable profile is one that is honest.

I would like to say this- put utmost effort in anything you do and grab opportunities as they come. If you want to know more, email would be the best way to reach me. :)

T5E: What does the two-year plan look like? Any specific future goals?

V.S.: I want to spend the next two years doing a variety of things. I will be heading off to Price Waterhouse Coopers to work in the area of International Taxation (Transfer Pricing) as a Senior Analyst. During the weekends, I will be volunteering for the cause of health and education. In the process, I will also be working with a few start-ups to gain some operational experience and build sector expertise. Other than that, I am resuming my dancing career and heading to Spanish classes. Off course, travel plans and rowing lessons are embedded in the grand scheme!

ClasFest 2011

Music Club IIT Madras celebrated its 41st anniversary with Clasfest 2011 in the second week of August. The artiste line up this year comprised T M Krishna, Mysore Nagaraj and Manjunath, Nityasree Mahadevan and Hyderabad Brothers.

With the inaugural concert by T M Krishna (vocal) accompanied by R K Shriramkumar (Violin), K Arun Prakash (Mrudangam), N Guruprasad (Ghatam) and V Anirudh Athreya (Kanjira) on 9th August, the festival started with a bang. Krishna enthralled the packed CLT with an insightful Surutti (Geetharthamu, Thyagaraja) and an electrifying pallavi in Gowla.

Even as many areas of Chennai were plunged into darkness by an unexpected power failure, a superb violin duet concert by Mysore M Nagaraj and M Manjunath accompanied by Srimushnam V Raja Rao (Mrudangam) and V Suresh (Ghatam), took place in candlelight at the CLT on 10th August. Their renditions of Latangi (Marivere, Patnam Sub-

rahmanya Iyer) and Bhairavi (Lalite Sri Pravriddhe, Thyagaraja) were masterly.

Nityasree Mahadevan, accompanied by M A Krishnaswamy (Violin), I Sivakumar (Mrudangam) and H Sivaramakrishnan (Ghatam), demonstrated her classicism and versatility on 11th August with scholarly renditions of Shubhapanthuvrali (Ennalu, Thyagaraja) and Bilahari (Kamakshi, Muthuswami Dikshitar) as well as a reposeful 'tukkada' segment.

The concluding concert by the Hyderabad Brothers accompanied by V V Srinivasa Rao (Violin) and K V Prasad (Mrudangam), was held on 13th August. Their peaceful singing and authentic renditions of some rare compositions of Thyagaraja and Annamacharya were a fitting finale to Clasfest 2011. There was much to be learnt from their delineations of Lathangi (Marivere, Patnam Subrahmanya Iyer) and Keeravani (Kaligiyyuntegada, Thyagaraja).



Energy Day

The Energy Day was celebrated with much enthusiasm on 19th August 2011 primarily addressing energy management. The various discussions, presentations, talks and debates sparked a common thought process amongst those present: how much do we really manage our energy?

The Director, Prof V G Idichandy, in his inaugural address, stressed on the importance of bringing faculty and students alike at IITM to focus on key issues such as conservation, sustainability and carbon credit in energy auditing. Sustainable energy research initiatives must be encouraged to come out with an action plan and motivate students to

show interest and convert that interest to action.

The event gave a platform for researchers from different disciplines to present their works on energy research. While one end of the spectrum showcased Surendra Babu's novel electrolytes for solid oxide fuel cells as a core technology development enterprise, Fidal Kumar spoke of the highly acclaimed potential of microbial fuel cells (Biotech). Sri Hari Vikram presented his research in Solar Power whereas Srinivas Bhaskar spoke about Smart Grids as a fully integrated distribution and management system which may be future for power systems. The discussions throughout the event showcased a ro-

bust exchange of ideas on energy security, green power and fuel efficiency.

Throughout the discussions, Prof Ajit Kolar brought stimulating and thought provoking facets of energy research to the table. According to him, the primary goal that needs to be met is the development of sustainable systems of energy. He wittily added that though the future generations would be intelligent enough to manage their energy troubles, we should focus on being energy secure for the next fifty years first. He believes that while there is no dearth of energy sources, there is a crisis in energy utilization and management. There is a need to develop a quantitative indicator of energy security and sustainability. We must develop a complete system by taking energy research to greater heights and advocate the cause of sustainability in the campus.



The Land Before LAN

Only as recent as in year 2005, the internet connectivity in hostel rooms felt like a distant dream, a privilege available to select other IITs (we were 4th or 5th among then 7 sister IITs) but not to us, and a major crib point in usual students vs. admin discussions.

Something as basic as being able to Google information to be used in an assignment meant a cycle trip all the way back to Department / Computer Centre, downloading the required information in a Floppy ([flop-ee] – a square black plastic case, usually available at Gurunath for ₹10/-, containing a magnetic strip that could hold a whopping 1.44 MB of data) and cycling back to hostel. And if with God's grace the Floppy got corrupted (what an appropriate name as when it came to reliability it was as good as Indian bowling line up), brace yourself for the ordeal all over again.

The earliest attempt to bring Internet to Hostel zone was in 2001 when 30 Windows based desktops, aptly called Moon Lab (in response to the Academic Zone Computer Centre (CC) which had SUN based systems), were set up in what is now GC shop in Gurunath. The usage was rationed with auto log out after 30 minutes. The overburdened (30 desktops served 3,000+ students) and over surfed (life education sites topping the chart) systems aged

sooner than planned and the whole set up was discontinued in 2003.

*"...internet trapped us inside our rooms...
Yahoo chat & Orkut became omnipresent,
and rivalries beyond Schroeter in form of
LAN gaming were born. The number of
grand slams (bunking of all 4 slots in the
morning) rose alarmingly..."*

With DCF & Library computers still being ramped up, Computer Centre (CC) in Academic zone was the lone savior. It also served as a major hub for India's biggest "slipper exchange program" where it was guaranteed that you would not walk out with the same pair that you walked in with. So much so that to curb the nuisance, there were lockers set up that one could use to save the slippers from getting stolen. I don't think that arrangement worked because in my 5 years on campus, I never had to buy another pair and I knew I was not alone!

With this background, it's not difficult to imagine that when at the end of 2004 the plans to wire the entire campus with broadband connectivity were announced, what a big collective relief it was! With continuous push and support from admin & student

body, one by one all the rooms in all the hostels got wired and it changed many things forever!

Looking back, the story does not feel any different than the story for rest of the world in terms of impact internet has had on our lives. The obvious benefits; convenience, access to information and hence better opportunities, and efficiencies materialized for us as well. Information being available on finger tips meant students could do lot more research when it came to apping, job hunt or even BTPs/DDPs. The whole trend of foreign internships grew because of it.

Similarly we were not spared from the adverse effects either. Fundamentally internet trapped us inside our rooms and hence every interaction that used to take place outside took a beating. DC++ with even greater availability of life education videos became the norm, Yahoo chat & Orkut became omnipresent, and rivalries beyond Schroeter in form of LAN gaming (AOE, QUAKE, Counter Strike were hot favourites) were born. The number of grand slams (bunking of all 4 slots in the morning) rose alarmingly with rise in night long gaming sessions and surfing which later on brought restrictions on usage beyond mid-night.

Personally, I feel there are 2 things that I would have loved to see preserved. The first one is the Saturday movie at OAT. Before 2005, it was a ritual that one rarely missed participating in. Most of us fell in love with OAT on very first Saturday of being on campus as none of us had watched a big screen movie under open sky before. To top that, there were areas ear marked for each hostel junta to sit and the verbal duels and sloganeering against other hostels that took place fuelled the hostel spirit and bonding even further. All of this used to happen in front of Profs and their families and that added to the adventure. The interval time was the

most eagerly awaited one as some slide or other on a Lit-Soc or Schroeter results would be projected by the winning hostel in not so modest language and the uproar that used to follow was deafening! With advent of internet, movies reached our rooms before they reached OAT and this great tradition died a gradual death.

The second one is the after dinner fart sessions on wing coats where some of the wittiest and the most intellectual discussions that I have ever attended took place. The topics ranged from general crib session to international affairs, and to existential questions of human life and to hear junta speak about these so vividly and passionately in person was far more stimulating than engaging in same conversations on Orkut communities and groups!

On a positive side, we did not see a decline in interest in Sports as feared earlier but that could be because by our 3rd/4th year all of us were inducted into the sports culture already and we made sure that freshies followed the suite. Not sure if that has stayed on even afterwards.

I think it's human to feel nostalgic about past and hence the article may give a "old was gold" sort of feel. But at a rationale level, I strongly believe that change is an inevitable part of our lives and it did more of a good than harm. I will continue to watch my movies in OAT on Saturdays and in one of the hostel rooms during rest of the week whenever I am on campus next!

'Sarvesh a.k.a JJ, [2006/DD/CE] was Hostel Affairs Secretary in 2004-05 and resided in Alakananda Hostel. He likes playing Squash and blogging. After graduating, he has worked with Capital One, Barclays and is at present with Aviva. He is also founding partner of www.internshala.com (an Internship portal by IIT Madras, IIT Bombay and ISB Hyderabad alumni).

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Yesteryear

This article is the first in the series of articles from earlier editions of The Fourth Estate, the precursor to T5E. The following article is from the November 2002 edition

Group Discussions for Dummies v1.01

by *Gautam Kumar Raja (Batch of 2003)*

Considering that a large number of students from IITM will be writing the CAT this year and also considering the dismal nature of the group discussions that took place during the placements I feel it necessary to dispense some much-needed advice.

Here then is Group Discussions for Dummies (GDFD) – a patented technique practiced by hundreds of successful candidates and meant for use only by the aforementioned category of people known as Dummies.

Not sure if you're a Dummy? Here are some sure-fire indicators that you are:-

a) The first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the letters GD is any of: Grand Dialogue, Game Da, Group? Duh?, Gail Devers, Gastric Digestion, Gold Dust or God Damn!

b) You failed to understand the relevance of any of the pairings above.

The GDFD method does not guarantee success in normally-defined terms (Dummies read – it's not guaranteed to get you through to the next stage) but it does guarantee that if used effectively and in the proper manner it will help you hide any Dummy characteristics you might possess at least for the period of the GD.

Firstly, let us address some preliminary issues:-

1) It is always a good idea to dress neatly, if not formally, to any GD. Though the conductors of the GD are not likely to base their judgements on your attire, it must be noted that most Dummies tend to act like they're in a fish-market during a GD and if coupled with this they are also dressed like people in a fish-market...let's just say the overall fish-market effect stinks.

2) Remind yourself before the GD begins exactly what the letters G and D stand for. Then forcefully forget the first thing that came to your mind and ask your neighbour.

3) Try and remember the Golden Rules (GRs) of GDs :

A. Silence is better than Nonsense.

B. GDs are not merely extended JAM sessions... or in other words...

C. Over Objection is objectionable.

D. Ogling at cute man/woman across the table is rarely useful – it only helps those truly exceptional Dummies who are better off remaining silent throughout the GD.

Without further ado here is the GDFD technique. Dummies, please follow the instructions if not word for word at least in spirit.

1) All GDs have a topic of discussion that is either communicated verbally to the participants or in the form of a written dialogue/story. Whatever the case may be, the first thing a Dummy should do is put his/her hand on one's own forehead and pretend to mull over the topic for some time. To add to the scholarly effect one might even dabble some nonsensical verse on the provided sheet of paper. It is highly advised that Dummies do not indulge in playing tic-tac-toe or drawing any large lascivious diagrams at this point of time.

2) In the highly unlikely event that all members of a GD are Dummies trained in the GDFD technique, the GD will never get started and the method adopted has already succeeded. Hurrah! Unfortunately the real world is a cruel place and in all probability someone (Dummy/other) will start the GD off in a logically flawed and inconsistent direction. In such cases, allow the Speaker to talk till he utters the word 'Therefore' or any of its synonyms and at such time you must quickly and vehemently shout out 'I object'.

3) At this time all participants will turn to you. Remain impassive. More importantly, remain silent. When the others realize you have no intention of speaking, a participant who has actually realized what exactly the logical flaw in the opener's state-

ments is will take up the reins and point the GD in the right direction. Technically, the objection to the flawed argument is still yours and with any luck you will be credited with changing the direction of the GD. Hurrah! 10 points! Note: The above method which I'll call the Objection Method (OM) actually illustrates a prime characteristic of all managers i.e. using the talents of others effectively to one's own advantage and (though it can't be confirmed) it has been stated that some management schools look for the exhibition of exactly this sort of a skill during GDs. In which case, Hurrah! 20 points!

4) You are now well and truly in the lead. You may thus take a short break to quickly revise the Golden Rules.

5) You can now do one of two things – Try your luck once more with the aforementioned OM or more sensibly move on to the second of the pillars on which your success is based – the Iteration Method (IM).

6) Suppose there are N participants in the GD and you have already expressed agreement with the viewpoints of M of the participants (n1, n2, ... nM). Wait until a speaker other than n1 to nM speaks. Listen carefully to what this speaker says and at a suitable point of time, interrupt.

7) Say something to the order of "Carrying on from what X was saying I would like to add..." and then paraphrase what that speaker had to say.

8) If $M + 2 < N$ go back to step 6.

9) For good measure, repeat steps 6 and 7 one final time and then move ahead to step 10.

10) The IM is based on sound management principles and illustrates yet more of the characteristics appreciated in managers – namely, your openness to look at an issue from various points of view and the impression that you're quite an agreeable fellow. Hopefully by the time you've done all this, the GD is over. Hurrah! Success!

By using the GDFD technique you (Dummy) have given yourself the best possible chance to make it past the GD. More importantly, the GDFD ensures that Dummies remain harmless to the cause of non-Dummies like myself and thus gives the rest of us our rightfully deserved opportunity. In other words...you help yourself and help others as well.

So do remember...It takes all N members of a GD to make it a success...but it takes only one untrained Dummy to make it a failure for all involved.

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