

# EDUCATION PLUS

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Aruna Sankaranarayanan

**W**hen I was a doctoral student in the U.S., I had a friend, who was also from India. Though I struggled initially, I started calling my professors by their first names, just like the other students in my department. My Indian friend persisted in calling her professors 'sir' or 'ma'am'.

But she often spoke disparagingly of them, saying "X sir is an idiot" or "Y ma'am doesn't know a thing." When I asked why she didn't refer to them by their names, she said it was disrespectful!

I often recall this incident, as I teach a continuing education course, where the participants are mainly in-service teachers, keen to upskill themselves. One of my requests to them is to call me by my first name without affixing a title. While many do so, a few are diffident, and a small subset reluctant to do so, despite repeated requests. But I don't blame them.

In India, we tend to put our teachers on a pedestal but how many truly respect them?

And, in the context of education, how does the concept of respect fit in with a participatory approach?

the context of education, what are the consequences of holding someone in high esteem for a participatory approach?

#### Implications

The reason I persist in coaxing all participants to call me by my first name isn't purely rhetorical. This simple act also has pedagogical implications regarding the participants' relationship to knowledge, how they perceive their own learning, and how they view me.

As they are all adult learners, I prefer to think of myself as a facilitator with some degree of knowledge and expertise in the areas we are dis-

## No 'ma'am,' please



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cussing. But that does not make me an authority or the ultimate arbiter of truth. Additionally, expertise is usually accompanied by blind spots, and, every once in a while, we need to re-examine models and theories within a field through fresh eyes.

Further, calling me ma'am creates a psychological distance between me, the facilitator, and participants. Rather than being a 'sage on the stage', I view my role as being aligned with that of my participants.

We are all lifelong learners, seeking to enhance our knowledge and collective wisdom. Just as I have experiences and knowledge to draw on, the participants have deep wells of insights,

anecdotes, and examples to share that can either buttress or challenge some of the claims made in the discussions.

For us to have truly meaningful exchanges, participants need to feel empowered to question, challenge, or critique arguments put forth in class, either by me or by other participants. They also need to question the

readings. Just as we assume that the teacher has the last word, textbooks too are often perceived as the fount of truth.

To be effective learners, participants have to take ownership of their learning and not view the facilitator as someone directing – or worse dictating – their learning journey.

My role, perhaps, is to nudge each one to question many of the assumptions and preconceptions they might bring, and to help them define their own learning trajectories as they progress in directions that are meaningful and relevant to their unique contexts. But, I too am journeying with them, refining my own views, unpacking my presuppositions, and deepening my understanding.

Do my participants respect me? Sure, they do, just as I respect each of them, their perspectives and questions. When respect is earned, it is usually bi-directional. It is hard to hold someone in high esteem if that person doesn't respect you as an individual.

Every student and teacher, regardless of age or level of education, deserves to be respected. What is the point of education if it doesn't emphasise our common humanity?

Finally, when participants express dissenting viewpoints or ask tough questions, everyone stands to gain. Often, the enriching exchanges we have in class leave me energised and enthused. I only hope that the participants look forward to the next session as eagerly as I do. My only request: No 'ma'am', please.

The writer is visiting faculty, Azim Premji University.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

### NextGen Edu Scholarship

An initiative from Buddy4Study and EY Global Delivery Services.

**Eligibility:** Those in Class 11 at any private/government school across India who have secured minimum 60% in their Class 10. Annual family income should not be more than ₹3 lakhs from all sources.

**Reward:** ₹15,000

**Application:** Online

**Deadline:** June 26

[www.b4s.in/edge/EYCDSI](http://www.b4s.in/edge/EYCDSI)

### UK-India TOEFL Scholarship

Offered by Educational Testing Service (ETS), in collaboration with the National Indian Students and Alumni Union (NISAU).

**Eligibility:** Indian citizens applying to undergraduate or postgraduate courses in the U.K. who have taken the TOEFL iBT between April 1 and July 15, 2024, with a minimum score of 75.

**Reward:** ₹2.5 lakhs each for 10 students

**Application:** Online

**Deadline:** July 15

[www.b4s.in/edge/TOEFL](http://www.b4s.in/edge/TOEFL)

### J.M. Sethia Merit Scholarship Scheme

The J.M. Sethia Charitable Trust aims to support students in further studies.

**Eligibility:** Students from Class 9 onwards including those enrolled in full-time PG courses and professional degrees who have passed their previous qualifying exams.

**Reward:** ₹1,000 per month

**Application:** Through post to J.M. Sethia Charitable Trust, 133, Biplobi Rash Behari Basu Road, 3rd Floor, Room No. 15, Kolkata 01 OR Gandhi House, 5th Floor, 16, Ganesh Chandra Avenue, Kolkata 13.

**Deadline:** July 31

[www.b4s.in/edge/JMSM4](http://www.b4s.in/edge/JMSM4)

Courtesy: Buddy4study.com

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## Stay disciplined

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help



**OFF THE EDGE**

Nandini Raman

I am preparing to take the UPSC exams this year. I have a B.A. Public Administration (Hons) from IGNOU. I'm also a writer with two anthologies to my name. I am not sure about my Plan B. What are the possible career options or further courses I can do? Will joining an NGO help with the UPSC CSE? Siera

Dear Siera,  
What about further studies in Public Policy, Governance or Public Affairs, given your background in Public Administration? You will find roles in government, non-profit organisations and consulting firms after this. You can also explore media and journalism or content writing and copywriting. Does research and academia interest you? Joining an NGO or working in the development sector can be satisfying and provide valuable experience and insight into social issues, public service and community development. Try volunteering at an NGO that focuses on areas like education, child care, healthcare, human rights, social welfare, and environmental conservation as this will complement your UPSC preparation, offer insights into socio-economic issues, governance challenges, and grassroots realities, and enhance your understanding of public service delivery, policy implementation, and community engagement. It will also demonstrate your commitment to public service and will strengthen your

profile as a UPSC aspirant.

**I'm in the first year of B.Tech. CSE. I want to take the UPSC exams. But I'm getting addicted to my mobile. How can I overcome this?**

Greeshmitha

Dear Greeshmitha,  
Remember that overcoming this addiction requires self-discipline, patience and persistence. Stay committed and focus on your academic goal. Create a healthy study environment and commit to yourself that you will stay away from the phone during study hours. Make sure it is not near you, may be in another room or put it on Aeroplane Mode or switch it off. Set reasonable boundaries on usage; such as using it when you take a break or after you complete your portion. Limit access and delete any apps that distract you and mute notifications. Use apps like Pomodoro timer that will help you navigate your studies and free time.

Also, identify triggers and situations when you use the phone excessively: boredom, stress, feeling low, procrastination... Once you know, work on developing healthy coping mechanisms. Engage in some form of exercise to recharge the mind and the body and/or social engagements that will help put the gadgets away. Meditation, yoga, and mindfulness practice will cultivate awareness of your thoughts, feelings and emotions. If nothing works, please meet a therapist to get help. Tech and gadget addiction is like any other addiction (the gadget being the substance). You will get support at the OPD of Rehabilitation centres, if not admitted for a detox plan.

**After Class 12 (Science Stream), I earned a diploma**

**in Electrical and Electronics Engineering.** I am interested in spacecraft design and realised that Mechanical Engineering would have been a better option. Considering my family's finances, should I opt for another diploma in Mechanical Engineering or do a B.Tech. in a relevant field? My aim is to independently decide, plan and execute spacecraft-related works.

Adhithyan

Dear Adhithyan,  
Make the decision to pursue another diploma in Mechanical Engineering or a B.Tech. in a relevant field after a detailed assessment of your career goals, personal circumstances and financial considerations. Can you seek guidance from your academic advisors and mentors who may be able to help you make an informed decision? A diploma provides hands-on technical skills and practical training in a shorter duration but a B.Tech. offers a more comprehensive curriculum, theoretical knowledge, and research opportunities. Evaluate how each educational option aligns with your career aspirations. Mechanical Engineering provides a strong foundation in mechanics, materials science, thermodynamics, and fluid dynamics, deeply relevant to aerospace design. Mechanical Engineering with a specialisation in Aerospace, will probably better suit your career goals. Consider the financial implications of both courses. Research career prospects, employment potential, industry demand and potential for career growth in the aerospace or spacecraft design industry. Finally, it is all about your personal preferences, strengths and academic interest.

**Disclaimer: This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.**

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com with the subject line Off the Edge

Introspection and reform in high school education and the current student assessment practices is necessary for student well-being

**Akanksha Aggarwal**

**A** 2017 survey by the World Health Organization (WHO) painted a concerning picture of adolescent mental health in India, revealing that nearly 35% of adolescents in the 13-17 age group experience high levels of stress. Subsequent research by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) in 2022 found immense pressure surrounding studies, exams and academic achievement. According to the NCERT Mental Health and Well-being of School Students report, 81% students experience anxiety and stress before crucial exams. A 2020 study by the National Statistical Organisation said that one in five students in India take private coaching to meet the pressure of exams. As per the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), with over 13,000 student suicides in 2022, our current system, primarily relying on standardised tests and fixed grading, casts a long shadow over the holistic well-being of students.

**Competency based**  
In its attempt to potentially tackle this, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisioned assessment for learning to "continuously enhance teaching methods and optimise student development". A shift towards holistic assessments can help students showcase their

## Rethink assessments



learnings through classroom performance, oral examinations and written tests, thereby reducing end-of-the-year pressure. We must learn from the failures of the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system, which increased fear in students who struggled in certain formats of exams.

Performance Assessment, Review, and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development (PARAKH) has been introduced as a potential catalyst for change. It promotes competency-based assessment (CBA) through performance tasks, projects, portfolios, and even traditional tests. It addresses the need for flexibility, comprehensive teacher training and effective communication channels in student assessment.

CBA is directly linked to employability skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. It supports high-school students in successfully transitioning from adolescence to adulthood by equipping them with the 21st-century skills they need to thrive in the workforce. To address the challenges of the CCE system, PARAKH needs to offer flexibility to students and teachers, per-

haps allowing students to take multiple formats of tests and then allowing them to drop the lowest mark from the final grade to reduce weightage on a single format.

The Holistic Progress Card (HPC) is another hopeful initiative that offers a fairer representation of student achievement. It aims to promote equity by going beyond academics by giving detailed feedback and showcasing a child's unique qualities. However, it grapples with challenges such as fostering healthy competition and managing teacher workload. A comparison of emotional competency and competencies could trigger unhealthy competition. A teacher may also complete the feedback process quickly by giving standardised responses.

In the pursuit of change, we must scrutinise aspects around the teacher-student ratio, diversity of students and college admission criteria based solely on grades, which shape the educational environment and influence the outcomes of students. Let us advocate for introspection and reform in high school education, urging a collective effort to prioritise student mental well-being over the rigidity of our current student assessment practices. Finding solutions to these concerns is integral to ensuring the success of a revamped assessment system.

The writer is an Associate Manager for Research and Impact at Dream a Dream, Bangalore.

A CH-CHE

# Beyond the marks

Every year, during exam results season, not only do we hear of top rankers but also of suicides and depression due to low marks. When will we stop focusing solely on academic achievement?



WIDE ANGLE

Albert P' Rayan

The results for classes 10 and 12 from the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the Tamil Nadu State Board of School Examinations, and several other state boards, were announced recently. Print, electronic, and social media have celebrated top scorers and conducted interviews with them. As usual, high achievers were glorified and featured prominently. With the results of the NEET UG and JEE Advanced to be announced early in June, another round of celebration and interviewing top rankers will occur.

## Unrealistic expectations

In many families, these sto-

ries spark comparisons, with parents often measuring their children's performance against their peers. Some even accuse their children of letting them down or shattering their dreams. This is due to the unrealistic expectations and desiring the children pursue their own dreams. They do not consider that children have the right to have and pursue their own goals. Similarly, some teachers expect miracles from students and hope for top rankings at the district or state level. Both teachers and parents frequently convey the message: "If you score high marks, you are a success. If you score low marks, you are a failure." Some teachers even use slogans like "Achieve or perish" and "Shine or whine", believing these can motivate students, without considering the potential negative impacts.

During exam result season, we also hear stories of

failure and depression. Every year, exam results drive many students to take their own lives. Just a week ago, a 17-year-old student in Uttar Pradesh committed suicide after the CBSE Class 12 results were announced. According to another report, seven students from Telangana and four from Madhya Pradesh took their lives after receiving poor marks in intermediate and Class 10 board exams. There are likely many more unreported cases of suicides, depression, and mental health issues across the country.

## Tragic stories

These tragic stories resurface every year, yet little seems to be done to reform the system. The two major causes of these tragedies – unrealistic expectations of parents and the prioritisation of marks over knowledge – are interlinked. The relentless pressure to achieve high academic success leads to significant

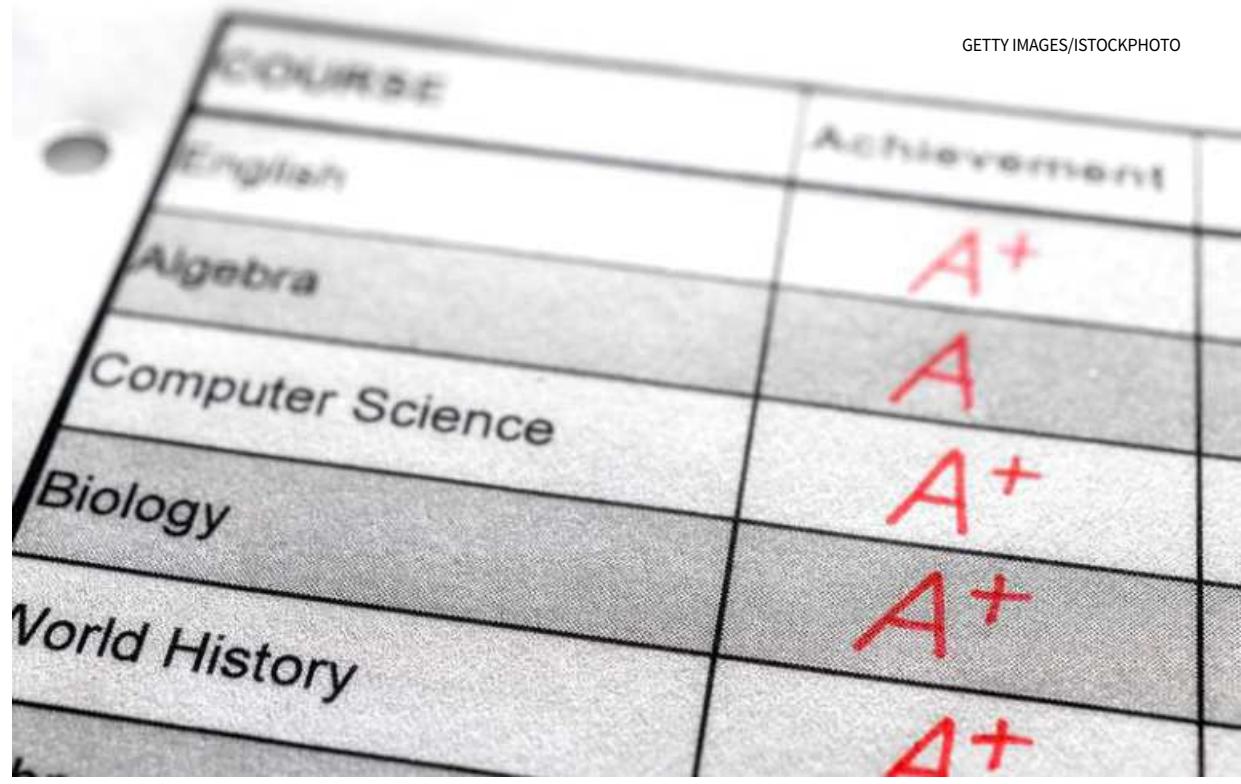
stress and anxiety, often resulting in mental health issues like depression and suicidal thoughts. This environment of tying self-worth to academic performance can paralyse students by developing a fear of failure and discourage them from exploring new interests. It fosters unhealthy competition, isolating students from their peers, and diminishing opportunities for mutual support. By focusing solely on

academic achievement, other crucial aspects of personal development, such as creativity and emotional intelligence, are neglected. Consequently, students who cannot meet these high expectations may develop a negative self-image, adversely affecting their confidence and self-esteem.

Until a few years ago, schools used to display students' examination results and marks on their notice

boards. Recently, however, various state governments have instructed educational institutions to stop this practice. A few years ago, the Director of Matriculation Schools in Tamil Nadu issued a directive asking all schools to refrain from promoting select students by publishing their names and photographs on banners or in advertisements. Unfortunately, some teachers seem to be unaware that breaching this confidentiality is an

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offence.

## Right motivation

Parents should motivate their children to set goals and achieve them. Encouraging them to chase their dreams is good, but pressuring them to chase marks is not. Children should not be made to believe that scoring high marks is everything in life. It is neither possible nor desirable for everyone to secure the first rank or dream of getting admission into an AIIMS or an IIT. Parents should be educated to understand that those who secure high marks are not always more intelligent than those who do not. Although exam scores can help secure seats in top institutions, marks are not always a yardstick for success in life.

Children should be encouraged to compete with themselves, not with others, to realise their potential and strive to achieve their dreams. It is crucial to promote a more balanced and supportive approach to education that values effort, growth, and well-rounded development over mere academic achievement.

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## GREEN CAREERS HUB

## Nurturing Nature

**Naturalist Nikhil John** describes the thrill of witnessing the wonders of nature up close, and how his greatest joy lies in sharing these experiences with others



NIKHIL JOHN

*The third in the monthly series by WWF-India that highlights niche and unconventional green careers through the stories of well-known personalities from the field of environment and conservation.*

**M**y journey into the field of wildlife conservation began rather unconventionally. I was an urban planner by day and a musician by night, but my true calling emerged when I volunteered with WWF-India. One day, I found myself unexpectedly leading a trail for underprivileged children. I think I did a good job because, at the end, children hugged and thanked me for giving them an experience they had never had before.

Now, as a naturalist, each day is an exciting adventure that brings new surprises, like running into a group of jackals or bumping into a snake in the out-

doors. I usually start early in the morning, exploring the wilderness with my binoculars. On some days, I lead nature trails or work on conservation projects with my team. In the afternoons, I usually handle office tasks like meetings and paperwork, getting set for more adventures.

A thrilling aspect of my work is being able to witness the wonders of Nature up close – from spotting a group of short-eared owls to discovering a leopard gecko. My greatest joy lies in sharing these experiences with others.

Imagine being out at sea, in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by dolphins, whales, and other marine animals. Suddenly, a curious bird swoops around your boat, sending everyone scrambling for their cameras. After a bit of chasing, you identify it as a oriental pratincole, a rare sight so far out at sea. As night falls, you're sur-

prised to find the pratincole bunting up right next to you. It sticks around for the next few days! Yes, this happened to me; one of the most memorable experiences of my professional life.

**Skills and connections**

My best buddies throughout my journey have been great communication and observation skills, a good sense of humour, and my binoculars! But the real game changers? Empathy and patience. Putting myself in others' shoes helps me understand them better, build trust, and create meaningful bonds.

My journey into the wild has been greatly influenced by my mentors and good friends, Kaustubh Srikanth and Arpit Deomurari. Kaustubh taught me how to lead nature trails, while Arpit showed me the wonders of birds and landscapes during our travels across In-



Jitendra Srivastava

**W**ith environmental issues taking centre stage today, the role of a Sustainability Specialist in Logistics is becoming important with job roles such as green technology integrators, carbon reduction supervisors, policy and compliance experts and collaboration architects. With pressing challenges like climate change and resource depletion, companies are realising the urgency of making their operations more sustainable. This transition has placed sustainability specialists in Logistics under the spotlight.

## What it involves

At the core, the role involves devising and implementing strategies to minimise the environmental footprint of transportation, warehousing, and distribution processes. This involves conducting comprehensive assessments of current practices, identifying areas for improvement, and collaborating with internal and external stakeholders to develop sustainable solutions.

Apart from this, the sustainability specialist analyses and optimises transportation routes, minimising fuel consumption and consequently reducing carbon emissions and ensuring proper disposal of harmful materials. They explore alternative fuels like biofuels and hydrogen to further decarbonise operations.

From optimising supply chain efficiency to reducing emissions and waste,

**Make a green transition**  
Sustainability specialists in logistics combine technical knowledge, strategic thinking, and collaborative leadership to drive positive change



diverse set of skills and attributes. Adaptability and problem-solving abilities are invaluable in navigating the dynamic and multifaceted challenges of sustainability in Logistics.

## Opportunities

Opportunities exist in a variety of sectors, including transportation, warehousing, manufacturing, and consulting. Moreover, the evolving nature of sustainability challenges ensures that there will be ample room for innovation and advancement. Whether leading sustainability initiatives within a single organisation or advising clients on best practices, sustainability specialists have the opportunity to make a meaningful impact and shape the future of Logistics.

A career as a sustainability specialist in the Logistics sector offers a unique opportunity to blend passion for environmental stewardship with professional expertise in supply chain management. By leveraging a combination of technical knowledge, strategic thinking, and collaborative leadership, individuals can drive positive change and contribute to a more sustainable future for businesses, communities, and the planet.

The writer is the CEO of Triton Logistics & Maritime.

the role demands a holistic understanding of sustainability principles and their practical application in a Logistics context.

The heightened awareness about the need to make our actions more sustainable means considering the impact on the environment, using resources wisely, and ensuring fairness for all.

Businesses, especially those involved in shipping, warehousing, and managing supply chains are realising that their activities, such as transporting goods and storing inventory, have a significant impact on the environment.

That's why there's a growing demand for professionals who can help them navigate this challenge and find ways to make operations more environmentally friendly while keeping costs in check and ensuring things run smoothly.

## Education

While specific educational

requirements may vary depending on the employer and the complexity of the role, a strong foundation in sustainability-related disciplines is typically essential.

A Bachelor's or Master's in fields such as Environmental Science, Sustainability Management, Logistics, or Supply Chain Management can provide the necessary knowledge and skills.

Additionally, certifications or specialised training in areas like carbon accounting, life cycle assessment, sustainable procurement, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) accreditation, and Certified Sustainability Professional (CSP) can further enhance qualifications and credibility. Continuous learning and staying updated on industry trends and best practices are also important.

In addition to academic qualifications, an aspirant also requires a

## Be a smart spender

Smart budgeting strategies can help students navigate the repayment of their education loans and build a healthy credit score



an effective repayment strategy.

## Monitor expenses

Tracking expenditure is a fundamental aspect that is often overlooked. There are several budgeting apps that can help you track what you are spending and practise mindful spending.

Whether it's a mobile app or noting down expenses on a spreadsheet or a notebook, keeping track of every penny helps students identify unnecessary spends and allocate more towards loan repayment.

## Emergency corpus

This is essential as a finan-

cial emergency can be unexpected. Ensure a portion of the money is put away towards a contingency fund to ensure there is no default on EMIs. This fund acts as a safety net during challenging times.

## Moratorium period

Although a grace period known as the moratorium is offered during which one need not repay, it is better to contribute either as Simple Interest (SI) or Partial Interest (PI).

Remember, the moratorium period is not interest-free. Interest accrues from day one and adds up over the moratorium period. Another aspect is that paying some amount during this time leads to financial

habits.

**Earning while learning:** An effective way to manage repayment is to supplement income through part-time work or freelancing. Look for jobs that align with your skills and schedule so that you can make some extra money without compromising your studies.

Opportunities include tutoring, teaching or any other form of part-time work. This also helps enhance one's resume and improves job prospects. Remember to also check what your visa allows in terms of working while studying.

The writer is Chief Business Officer-Student Lending and Insurance Business, Avanse Financial Services

## Rajesh Kachave

age their education loans effectively:

## Create a realistic budget

This helps one understand income, expenses and how much can be allocated towards loan repayment. List all monthly expenses, such as rent, groceries, utilities, and transportation costs.

Identify fixed costs so that a specific amount can be set aside for these and for other miscellaneous expenses. Follow the axiom of "spend judiciously and save religiously" to stay financially healthy.

**Use online calculator:** A College Course Expense Calculator helps you know the potential expenses and gives a clear picture of the amount re-

quired as loan. An Education Loan EMI Calculator can be used estimate the monthly installment.

Work out various combinations of tenure and loan amounts to find a suitable EMIs that meets your financial requirements. Once this is finalised, other expenses can be adjusted to accommodate repayment.

**Consult experts:** Industry experts can provide accurate insights into various aspects, including repayment. So, connect with lenders to clarify doubts about the total amount, tenure, interest rate and so on to chalk out