

It has been seven years since I graduated from college. 7 years is a long time and I have had ample time to think about what I am grateful for and what could I do better. My cousin starts IIT Kgp shortly, asked for advice (out of politeness I suspect) and immediately regretted it, since I am never short on advice.” This post is an outcome of the subsequent discussion. Since I have only experienced one college (IIT Kgp/ tempo high hai) and I am only drawing from my experience, this post might be come across as severely biased and is in no manner universally applicable

So, How to “College”?

1. Find what you love ASAP

We had people in our batch who knew what they wanted to do from day1
One friend wanted to be a physicist, another loved management consulting. In my opinion, they made the most of IIT. They were also the happiest.
They were also the only people I was jealous of

Once you know what you love, you will figure out a way to get there. The ‘how’ is considerably easier than the ‘what’.

It won’t be easy and you won’t have the answer tomorrow.
But make it a priority and keep looking

2. What you love need not be exotic

I had to add this because movies (esp. Bollywood heroes with their cameras & cars) have made us believe otherwise. What you love need not be exotic. Scientific Research, Programming, Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Banking, consulting, Leadership, Design, Film Production, Acting – anything is fine as long as you truly feel you are willing to go the extra mile to be good at it. And if you are choosing between 2 options, the ‘suffering’ test will help [link](#)

Cousin- But how do I find what I love?

No easy answers, bro. But I will offer my \$0.02

3. Your Department + Tech = an exciting future

Just be good at what you are studying a.k.a. “there is no such thing as a bad department”

[Software will eat the world](#) This is true.

The good thing is, software will eat all worlds, across all your departments.
So if you understand whatever you are studying (biotech, agritech, civil tech...) you will be part of this future. In fact, what is stopping you from building the future today? Which brings me to...

4. Code = English

I don’t expect everyone reading this to become an expert programmer.
But comfort and experience with code will make life easier irrespective of what you decide to do next. I truly feel coding has almost become like English. You don’t need to know the history of how grammar evolved, you don’t need to be Shakespeare, but your chances of doing well improve if you are conversant and comfortable with

English. Ditto with programming

But coding is just a tool to codify solutions, just like mathematics is a tool to codify physics. So you need code after you have a solution. And for that you need to have a problem that needs solving Which brings me to....

5. Build Shit

If you don't remember anything from this post, remember this – “Build something useful, something that works, before you graduate” Chances are, once you build something you will get addicted. And college is the best place to start.

And software allows you to be a builder, irrespective of what department you are in. Build a car, rocket, an intelligent drip irrigator, build a website, an app, or build a business.

I would go so far as to say that if you haven't built something that works and makes life easier, your education here is incomplete. Start anywhere, build anything

And when you build, shout about it, show it to people, find the best stage for it. Which brings me to...

6. Exposure

Irrespective of what you are doing and where you are in your journey to find 'what you love', maximize exposure. And I don't mean canteen talk exposure. Helpful exposure comes from experts, not canteen talk. If you are studying economics (because it is a required subject or you are curious or it is what you love), actively find experts and get access to them.

Go to conferences, attend web seminars, subscribe to the right content, write to people. Showcase what you have built/ worked upon, even if you feel it is embarrassing. Great exposure comes from experts. Gain knowledge, stake out the experts and get their perspective. Keep asking – “What does the future of <insert your interest area here> look like?

An informed commentary on the future is tough to get from your peers / inside your room. It is also the most critical piece while making decisions. Get out of your room and find experts.

Cousin - What if I have absolutely no interest in my department, despite trying?

A – Well, then you will have to find another combination of points 4,5 and 6 that works.

Learn programming, build something with others, work even harder on exposure till you find something that resonates with you.

Cousin – What else?

7. Find Mentors

The sooner you find good mentors, the better. You are never too young to gain from mentorship

8. Build diverse relationships

A good shortcut to gain exposure is to use your peer group. Have a diverse peer group, across departments, across gender, across language, across interests, across geographies and across age. This is the easiest hack to learn better and faster

Be deliberate about diversifying relationships. Ask yourself – “are your relationships diverse enough”

9. Take initiative ...

At least once before you graduate, ask yourself what can be better around you and fix it. Do it at the hall, gymkhana, department or a neighboring village (bonus if you can go national or further) Translating your thoughts into plans, putting those plans into action and rallying people to get stuff done – these are valuable skills in the real world. The more you do this, the better you get at it.

And when you are at it, try to make it a 11 star experience [link](#)

These also make for great stories 😊

10. Do something you have never done before

Every once in a while, try to pick one thing that you haven't done before
Could be dramatics or a new sports or hiking or elocutions, core research, volunteering, music - anything

This is another hack to diversify your world view.

11. This is the best time to try the crazy/ ambitious / hard stuff

It is often easy to miss what you have in front of you. IIT is a great launchpad. Trust me, what you have today – a brand that opens doors, professors who can be good guides, abundance of smart collaborators (peers), enough time on your hands, access to amazing (&free) resources, low cost of living – will be hard to come by once you graduate. If you do have a crazy idea in your head, this is your best shot to pull it off.

Want to start a comic web series, build a rocket, organize a convention, build an app, write a technical paper, prove a theorem – now is the best chance you have.

Any of this is much more difficult to do when you all go separate ways, juggling a job and paying rent. You can attempt the crazy/ ambitious/ hard things now.

If you don't have a crazy idea, someone in your batch will have one. Go, find her/him