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WATCH OUT

Autumn'16 Edition

Students' News Magazine

cover story

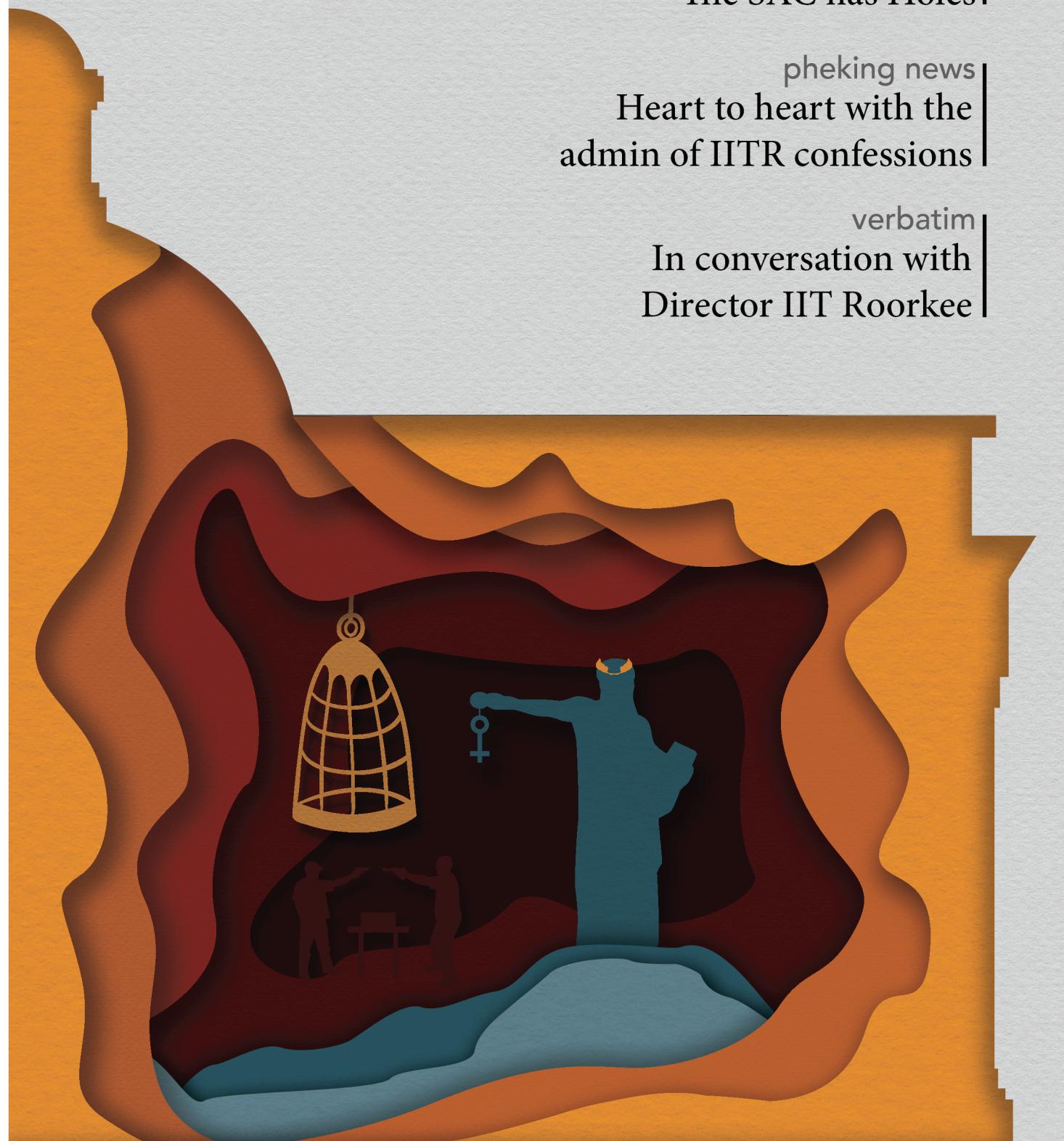
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Editorial

Editor's Column : Of Bygones

History always has a place in molding the culture of any place. Roorkee was not born into the IIT system, rather made a fairly quick transition when the time came. In the case of IITR, University of Roorkee had a major part in shaping the mores of the inhabitants here. Over my three years of undergraduate life at IITR I have heard many people complaining about the University culture which still plagues this place. It is indeed saddening to find that we still blame the ghost of University of Roorkee for all our undoing and inactivity. We fail to realize that there was a great culture and a legacy that University of Roorkee had to offer us. There were Ranji players and national snooker champions, Air Marshals and Army Generals, renowned engineers and bureaucrats who emanated from University of Roorkee, but we let it go. And we cling to all those degenerate, obsolete and archaic practices which are still entrenched in our very roots. It has been 15 long years since we are on the IIT map and still haven't been able to shape our own campus culture. I do acknowledge the fact that change cannot happen overnight. But that change requires each of us to come out of our comfort zones.

It is no wonder that there is a substantial passive population at R which is least bothered about things happening outside their bhawan rooms. The dormancy, stoicism and impassiveness of IITR are the last things I want to comment on, but they raise their ugly heads over and over again in everything from the vacant seats in a guest lecture to the very fact that we are still the 6th best. It is ironic to comment about the idleness when we have witnessed ignominious events leading to the cancellation of SAC elections. R-Land has always been attracted to politics, be it within the bureaucracy, elections or even student groups. There exists the X waale, the Y waale, you count the letters of the alphabets. The bitter truth is that politics often gets sordid and eats away progress. But I do see enough light around and cannot shrug off the positives from the table. The opening of a tinkering lab, an incubation centre, changes in the

academic system, a Global Entrepreneur's Conclave, a massive protest against the 11pm curfew for girls receiving support from all corners of the campus, much has happened over the past one year. But let us not stop here, not until we achieve what we came for and are striving for. Yes dear reader, change is inevitable, but the pace, steadiness and response to the change matter just as much as the change itself.

I must admit that Watch Out! was confined to the shackles of just another campus group for a long time driving us to a less influential power in the campus when we had to be the voice of the student body. Awakening to our role as the news body of the campus and its potential, in the past semester we have tried to be updated, critical and supportive of all activities in the campus, raising issues and covering stories from around the insti, and every time we do that, it instills in us the responsibility of keeping up the good work, carrying on the legacy and not forgetting the very purpose of our existence (no, it's not just chapos and bakar).

In this issue of Watch Out! We speak about a bristle of changes at IIT Roorkee- from SAC elections to the academic system, things are getting revised. The Cover Story analyzes the recent changes in the SAC structure, the installation of the interim SAC, and its shortcomings. Through the Big story, we hope to shed some light on the obscurity surrounding the academic system at IITR including the flexibility (or better, rigidity) offered, relevance of courses and the option of honors and minors. In career series, Dr. Loveesh Chanana speaks about collaboration between academia and industry. Elsewhere, there is a conversation with the admin of IITR Confessions for phekng news, a comic strip along with many other articles. To all those ideating meetings, late night discussions, interviews and research behind this issue. Cheers!

-Renju Kokkattu

Predictably Irrational?



Think of a well-engineered car: an engine with good horsepower, sound suspension – capable of navigating numerous types of terrain. Assume that it has to go from point A to B via a thin, rather arduous patch of road. The degree of success, then, is dependent not only on the car itself, but also on the proficiency of the person driving it. While the line between the two is thin, once visible, it cannot be overlooked.

Intelligence becomes the car, and rationality the driver. The car is a given; unalterable and permanent. The driver's resourcefulness, then, determines the probability of reaching the destination. In casual conversation, intelligence and rationality may mean the same; however (counter-intuitive as it may sound), they are only weakly correlated, and therefore, largely independent of each other.

Intelligence is defined as "ability to efficiently achieve goals in a wide range of domains", while rationality is "the art of choosing and implementing actions that steer the future toward outcomes ranked higher in one's preferences". Intelligence – quantified by IQ – is a measure of how easily one picks up various skills (the "theory" component). Rationality (measured by RQ) is the ability to use acquired skills, account for various innate cognitive biases and make decisions to deliver a desired outcome.

From an evolutionary standpoint, intelligence precedes rationality. Jared Diamond hypothesised that an average tribesperson of Papua New Guinea is more intelligent than the average European, his rationale being that European countries have a good standard of living and good accessibility to important services, while in the case of the tribes, isolation from such facilities presents challenges to the continuation of life on an almost daily basis. Meeting these challenges requires intelligence, synonymous with adaptability. Simultaneously, perfect rationality is never possible. This is for two reasons: first, the number of cognitive biases is so great that we do not have the ability to account for all of them. Secondly, any previously acquired knowledge is inevitably associated with certain prejudices – more so in the case of people with higher IQ.

Unlike IQ, however, RQ is not an unalterable quantity; one may make himself "more rational" by learning about the thinking errors and fallacies the human mind has a tendency of committing, and avoiding them in practice. Greater rationality leads to a happier future, as it signifies agreement between one's actions and one's view of the consequences of those actions in the future.

Ernest Hemingway once mused: "Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know". Intelligence (here) encompasses self-awareness – knowing one's capabilities and limitations; the good and the bad embedded within. Focussed on the possibilities these entail rather than actually pursuing them, intelligent people often swim in rivers of self-doubt and self-hate. Rational people skip straight to the answers, and are able to get what they desire out of such situations. Morality and ethics are unimportant, insofar as they are able to fulfil their own needs. Intelligence becomes severely debilitating; rationality frees us from its chains as long as we learn to forget what we assume we know.

The locks they Are A-rattlin'

While a student's life revolves around juggling academics, sports and culturals, the aforementioned subjects face a lot of scrutiny and form the crux of casual discussions about life at IITR. As is the case with most things at IITR, various inadequacies come to the fore only after an unfortunate mishap. The recent scrutiny involving the curfew of girls and the inadequacy of the IITR hospital have seen the unearthing of many such shortcomings in the area of safety and security at IITR. In a two part series, Watch Out! digs deeper into a domain that is understated in its importance and as a result is oft overlooked.

How safe are we?

The problems:

Roorkee, being volatile by virtue of its inherent communal diversity, provides a challenge while securing the campus from various threats. The vicinal areas are purported to have a high crime rate and pent up tension. The campus of Roorkee, during the day, acts as a connecting link between parts of the town. However, a chat with the Security Officer, Mr. K.P. Singh reveals that the entire blame cannot be shifted onto IITR's unfortunate locality. According to Mr. Singh, the challenge is as much internal as it is dependent on externalities.

The institute makes it mandatory for families of staff and faculty to possess colour coded dependent passes, with an aim of serving as an accountable measure of the people residing in the institute.



But as is the case with most other rules of the land, there are always some who inadvertently find loopholes and flout the norms. This makes it very difficult to gauge the exact number of people using a single dependent pass. To quote Prof. D.K. Nauriyal, "We have servant quarters where if one is allotted, 8 dependents would stay there and we don't know if they are actually dependents or not."

Being aware of threats posed by such situations, the institute takes it upon itself to enforce certain restrictions which inevitably curb a student's freedom of movement. The justifiability of such restrictions is arguable, with each side having its own merits and demerits.

Solutions and steps taken:

Securing the campus is inextricably linked to extending various other facilities in the campus. Arguments against suspending the women's timing restrictions are often quelled by citing the age old reasons of security and porosity of the campus. Under a budget of around 25 lakhs per month, IITR currently outsources the security to private security contractors.

Security being out of the jurisdiction of the SAC, the last SAC worked towards pushing a proposal for improving security in the campus, with an emphasis on the timing restrictions. The proposal intends to build on the recommendations of the Justice Verma Committee, which was



constituted to look into the security of women after the brutal 2012 Delhi gang rape. The committee unequivocally stated that locking women up is not the solution to the security of women and that it is the prerogative of universities to provide for the security that enables women to exercise as much freedom as is guaranteed by the constitution. While one can't help acknowledge the gravity of the obstacles to absolute security on campus, locking up adults well into their 20s seems rather short-sighted and primitive, as far as solutions go. "We're not questioning the students' judgement", says Prof. D.K.Nauriyal, "Our only concern is their safety. There have been times when we've personally roamed around the campus and found lots of eve teasers. We rounded them up and took them to authorities. The moment we're sure that our girls are safe, we'll open it for 24x7 as we've no problem with that."

The proposal acknowledges the porosity of the campus as one of the primary bottlenecks in achieving better security. This is in part to the fact that there are various public offices within the campus and partly due to unauthorised and unaccounted residents inside the campus. Proper documentation of vehicles as well as institute residents is suggested as a way to counter this challenge. The in place scheme of dependent cards is a sufficient measure if implemented thoroughly and documented comprehensively. This needs to be complemented with a similar scheme for vehicles. The proposal suggests defining "authorised vehicles" as a vehicle belonging to a faculty or employee of the institute and accompanied by a dependent card. Unauthorised vehicles would require the submission of ID Cards/Driving Licences before entering the institute.

The occurrence of eve teasing in the campus, despite all preventive measures, is lamentable. IITR has a relatively unknown and dormant body called the "Committee against Sexual Harassment (CASH)". Its inactivity has essentially lead to all such cases being handled by the DOSW office. CASH is headed by Prof. Ritu Barthwal of the Biotech department and constitutes of various professors. However, students who encounter cases of eve teasing barely know of such a bureaucratic structure and do not resort to pursuing a complaint actively. To quote the DOSW, "It's not dormant. But it's activated only when there's a complaint received. The point is that lots of complaints do not come to the committee. The moment we get a complaint we immediately forward them to the committee and there are actions."

The October Revolution:

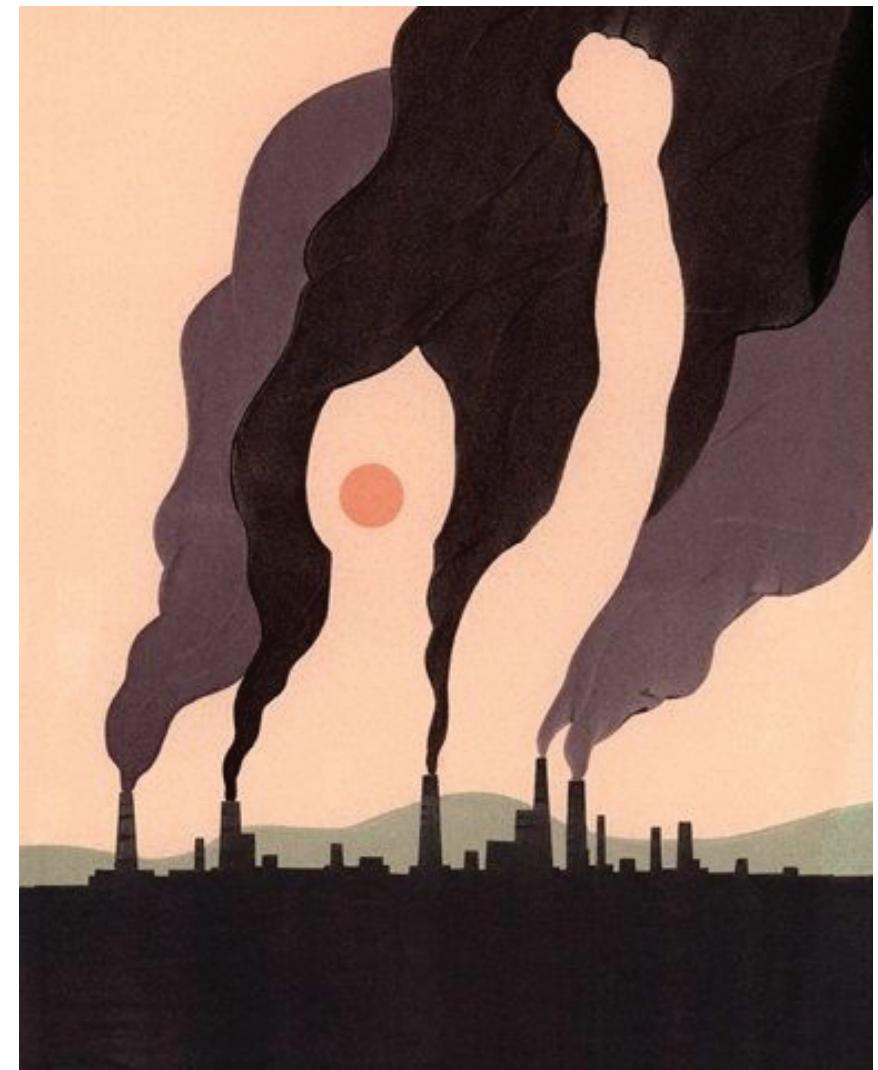
After grappling with the administration's nonchalance on the issue of the 11pm curfew on girls, the student body finally resorted to a peaceful protest against the rule. Students defied the deadline and gathered at the gates of Kasturba Bhawan, equipped with candles and banners, and started the march at 11 pm. An assembly of around 400 students was then led on towards the Main Building, ultimately proceeding towards the Hill View faculty residences where attempts for an audience with the Chief Warden, Kasturba Bhawan and the DOSW were made.

The DOSW ultimately agreed to address the students gathered and this is what he had to say on the issue, "We are not indifferent to your problems. We need to look after the security of you students, especially girls." He focused on the porosity of the campus, saying, "People go to CBRI, moving through the campus. You have NIH here. You have many spots like servant's quarters and all that. All kinds of people come here."

He added that they agree with the views of the students, in principle, but their only concern was security which they must ensure. The involved students then took up the matter with the MHRD through a letter. The MHRD in its response has appointed Prof. Pradeep Kumar, Department of Civil Engineering as the Nodal Officer for coordinating on the issue. However, the institute still waits for a decisive outcome to this issue.

Hospital Inadequacy:

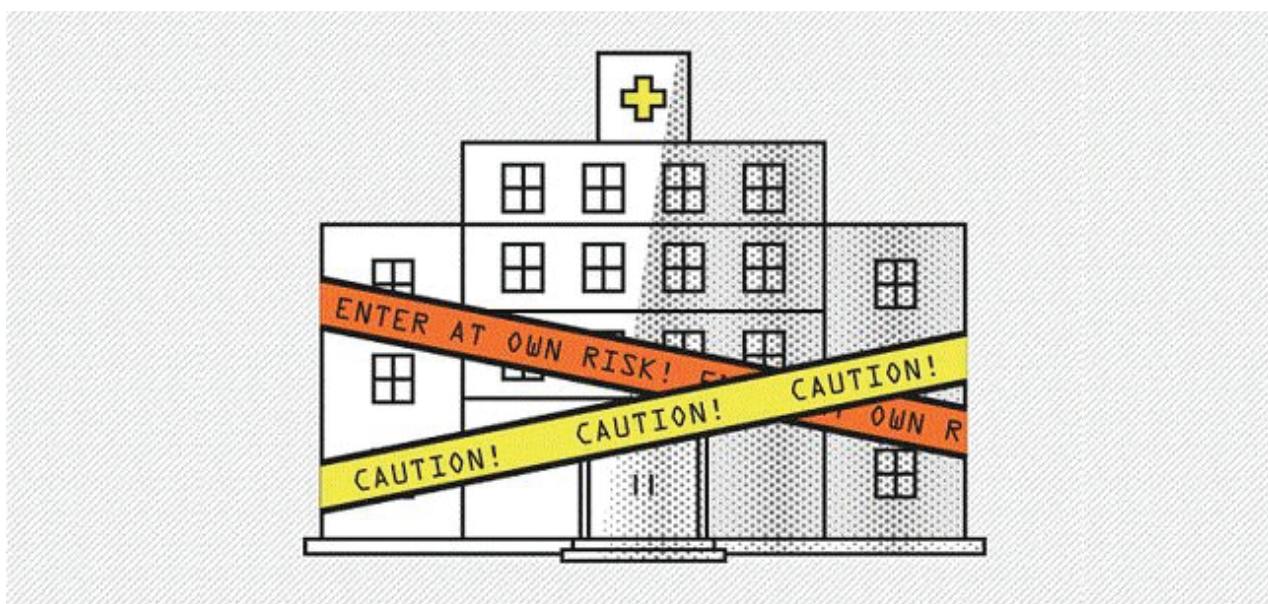
As is the norm in Roorkee, many a critical issue is brought forth only after serious mishap. The unfortunate and tragic death of Anurag Sharma owing to an injury on the squash courts last year, opened the can of worms regarding the health care issues on campus. The mumbles of discontent have burst forth after this freak disaster. As unanimously agreed upon, it's high time the medical facilities on campus were revamped to meet the standards one comes to expect of a premier institution. Following the incident, a special meeting of the SAC was called for, wherein myriad problems were brought forth regarding the institute hospital and the counselling cell.



Following multiple complaints regarding the dire state of affairs at the institute hospital, an assignment was undertaken to compare IITR's facilities with sister IITs'. As expected, Roorkee's paltry facilities are further dwarfed in contrast. The facilities available at other IITs are admirable. For instance, the pathology lab of IIT KGP has been awarded two citations for consistent quality maintenance. Most other IITs are well equipped with emergency rooms and advanced equipment like Multi Parameter Patient Monitor, ECG, Radiology and Pathology services. IITD stands out, having 24 hours ECG facilities and excellent emergency medical support.

The problems of the IITR hospital are twofold, with both the staff and equipment found lacking on several occasions. The complaints start right from the hostile reception one receives at the registration counter. The modus operandi calls for doctors to visit the hospital every time a student shows up with a medical issue. But the doctors tend to show a step motherly attitude towards their duties at the hospital, and consider it a necessary chore.

The location of the physiotherapy department on the 1st floor defies common sense.



Adding to this, there are no wheelchair facilities for the injured or the aged. Questions have been raised regarding the hygiene on the premises, photos of algae in water cooler having created quite the uproar. The lack of specialists is a matter of serious concern. The hospital lacks basic monitoring equipment. The existing equipment, including X-ray and Ultrasonography machines are dysfunctional and unmanned. It's no clairvoyance to predict an impending tragedy considering a widespread sports culture in the campus. The pathology lab lacks proper equipment and staff to execute basic tests like Vitamin B12, Vitamin D3, ANA, etc. The bed strength of the hospital can't cater to the needs of the entire junta on campus. It's a chilling realization that we are at the Lord's mercy in case an epidemic breaks out, considering the dire absence of good hospitals in Roorkee. Ambulance service is sparse and slow, especially in cases of transferring students to medical units outside IITR.

In an interview with the CMO, he insists on the production of the medical booklet at the counter since it confirms the students' contribution to the medical fund. He also berates the lack of discipline among the student community visiting the hospital and insists that they form queues and maintain decorum except in case of emergencies. Speaking about the problems that the hospital faces, he acknowledges the shortage of doctors and specialists. He confirms salary issues as a hindrance to hire a trained radiologist. He, however, assures us that the X-ray and ECG issues will be resolved, and informs us that,

in a welcome step, lifts and wheelchairs are being planned.

In spite of all talks and promises, the situation has gone southwards. The administration plays the location card as their defence for the lack of facilities and trained personnel in the hospital. But the institute hospital, if properly developed, can turn its inopportune location to its advantage, and act as a focal point for healthcare in Roorkee. This will consequently attract qualified people. The current state of affairs in the hospital leaves much to be desired. The recent agitation and the subsequent discussions will hopefully pave the way for remedial actions. In the meanwhile, improved student participation and deliberations will surely act as a pressure point for the administration and lead to proper management of the medical fund.

Epilogue:

A lot has been said on the same, and the issue of security and safety on campus has been up for debate for more than a decade now. But as far as definitive measures to solve these issues go, the admin has very little to show. The implementation of a lot of the above said changes could bring about a sea of change in the current state of safety on campus. Achieving this also calls for co-operation and understanding from the student body. It requires one to conduct themselves in a manner that does not put one in danger outside the campus while also working in cohesion with the security authorities.

Summer Diaries : Inria Research Centre, Paris



Shashank Anand is a 4th year student in the Department of Civil Engineering. Read on as he recounts his experience of working with the POEMS team at the Inria Research Centre, Paris during the summers of 2016.

Making it there:

Having secured a decent CGPA and after getting a positive reply from Germany, I decided to apply for the venerated DAAD Scholarship. However, thanks to my dreadful luck, I could not apply for it as my mentor decided to move to USA in October end and I was left with no other options.

Unbowed, unbent and unbroken, I started looking for other opportunities and came across the Charpak Internship Program for France. Subsequently, I sent applications for an internship position.

I got a positive reply from the POEMS team (INRIA Research Centre, Saclay) and applied for Charpak Research Internship Program 2016. This program is really competitive unlike Daad Scholarship Program for Germany. I was one of the 25 students from all over India to be

awarded this Scholarship by the French Embassy.

I was getting paid by my lab as well as the Charpak Scholarship Programme. All the important arrangements were taken care of by Campus-France team (an enterprise responsible for promoting French higher education).

Alluding to France, they have summer vacations till August and winter vacations in November end to December. So the most advisable duration of applying would be September End to Mid November and if you are not successful in securing a position then you can also try in January-February.

From my personal experience there are two things that matter the most in your application.

- 1) Length: The length of your email should be as small as possible touching upon only the most relevant details.
- 2) Content: Key things for getting a positive reply.
Why have you applied for that particular professor or you may discuss something from his/her

personal page.

Your experiences in the field of research you are applying for and your expectations from the internship.

Work:

My area of interest lies in the field of High Performance Computation. I got an opportunity to work in POEMS team (INRIA, Saclay) on the aforementioned topic. The research theme of the team is centered on the conception, analysis, numerical approximation and control of mathematical models for the description of wave propagation phenomena.

My mentor was trying to simulate three dimensional propagation of elastodynamic wave, but the computational cost was too high for practical purpose and this is the point where my internship work started. The first week's work involved reading literature and understanding the problem. In the second week, after having long technical discussions with my mentor, I proposed a roadmap to deal with this problem and I started working on that. By the end of my intriguing internship, I was successful in reducing the computational cost by a considerable amount.

Talking about the working culture of the team, there was an optimum balance between creativity and discipline. I was enthralled by the passion everyone showed in what they were pursuing. All the team members used to go together for lunch which was really delicious. We used to have informal conversations on topics ranging from European girls to Brexit. Every Friday evening there used to be a barbecue, a perfect start for the weekend.

What's to love about the place?

Weekends in Paris:

I was lucky to get an internship in the city of lights, Paris. I spent my three weeks exploring Paris which is not enough to explore this alluring place. One weekend, I prepared typical Indian daal for my French friends and they loved it.

One weekend, I prepared typical Indian daal for my French friends and they loved it. One of my really good friends Florent, who was also my lab mate, made a sketch of mine as a return gift.

Walking through the streets of Paris was an unparalleled experience. Just wandering through the city is entertaining full with resplendent insights into the history, art and romance of the place.

Fortunately, I visited Paris during Euro Cup tournament. The ambience on the streets of Paris during the match of France in Euro Cup was nonpareil. After the historic win of France over Germany, people went crazy and then I realised that one could feel the heat of an India vs. Pakistan cricket match even in France. Everyone was celebrating as if they had won the tournament. I got to see the final match in the fan zone in front of Eiffel Tower. Unfortunately France lost to Brazil and after the match you could see the France supporters walking like zombies across the streets.

Travelling around:

Being a travel buff, I had some special plans for spending my weekends. Summer is the best time in Europe to travel. I visited different places like Saint Michaels, Marseilles, Rennes, Bruges, Brussels, and Amsterdam etc. You can also go for some adventurous sports like hiking in Calanque in Southern France which was awesome.

People and Food:

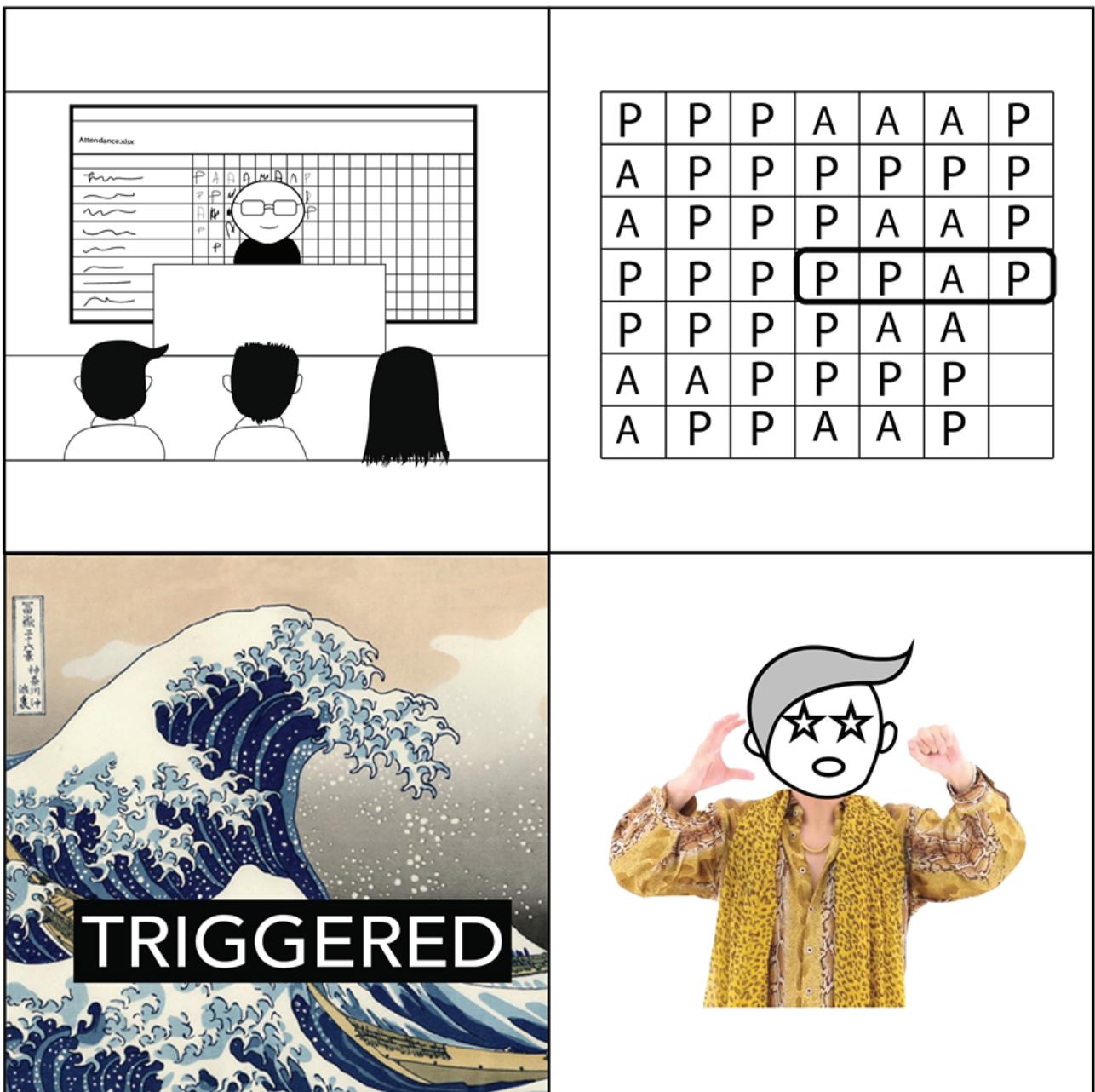
People are really helpful in Europe. So you will not find any problem. Yes, you need to be a bit careful but there is nothing to be scared of. Personally, I loved the French food (P.S. Non-vegetarian). I tried different kind of meal, cookies, chocolates, and drinks. While travelling I preferred to stay with the locals rather than in hotels. You get to know their lifestyle and typical local food which in itself is a unique experience.

Takeaways:

To conclude, I would like to say that my internship has definitely given me a better understanding of my skill set and where my career may take me, but most importantly, I've come to learn that you must be passionate about what you are pursuing. Don't just sit in your cabin and do regular work, take a look at the things around you, talk to your lab-mates, try to know their perspective, these things matter a lot.

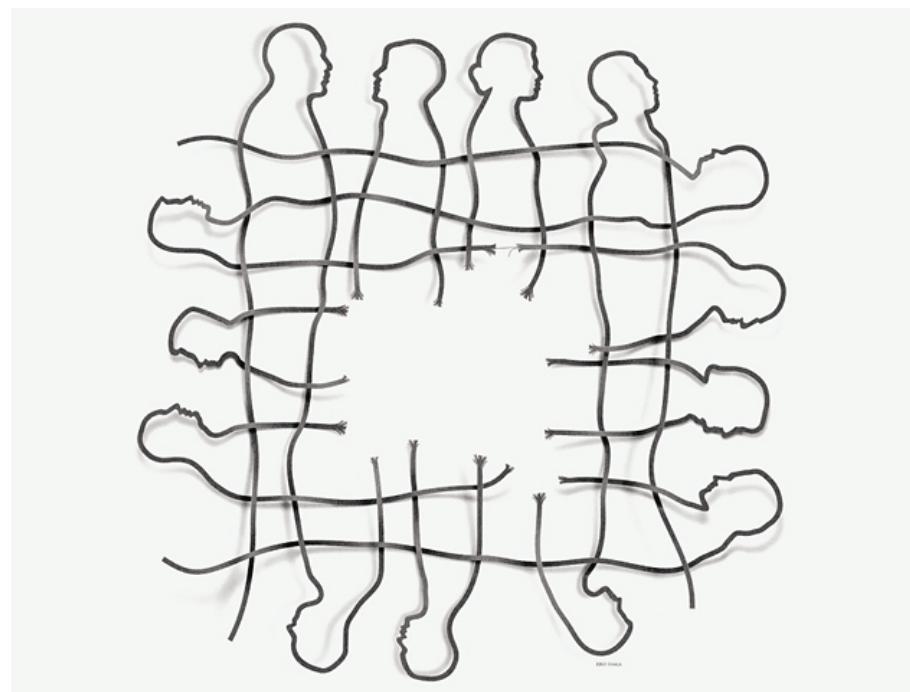
In the end I would like to say that there are many excellent opportunities waiting for you, all you have to do is start exploring your way out. Chase the idea of happiness and success will find you!

Comic Strip



Cover Story : The SAC has Holes

In most discussions pertaining to systems, processes and cultures, IITR is found to be lacking when compared against its sister IITs. The previous academic year saw us moving one step further in one such domain – our electoral systems. However, just as we saw the transition being successful and meritocracy coming to the fore in the case of elections, an unfortunate incident in Jawahar Bhawan, took us two steps backward. Incidents like these force us to dwell upon our shortcomings, both in terms of students and organisations. Herein, we try to offer an analysis of the electoral system at IITR.



The earlier system of elections:

The earlier system of elections at IITR required for a two level voting system to take place. A council of 108 members, called SAC-1, consisting of Bhawan level office holders was elected, with a voter's vote restricted only to the posts in their Bhawan. The elected 108 then voted for a SAC-2 which became the primary executive body of the SAC, responsible for institute level decisions and changes. This system created a need to unite a majority of 55 candidates under a single umbrella. What filled that void were easy targets based on identifiable and personal common grounds. Unbecoming as it might be of an institute of our stature, but votes were cast based on regional and factional preferences.

The Jawahar fiasco:

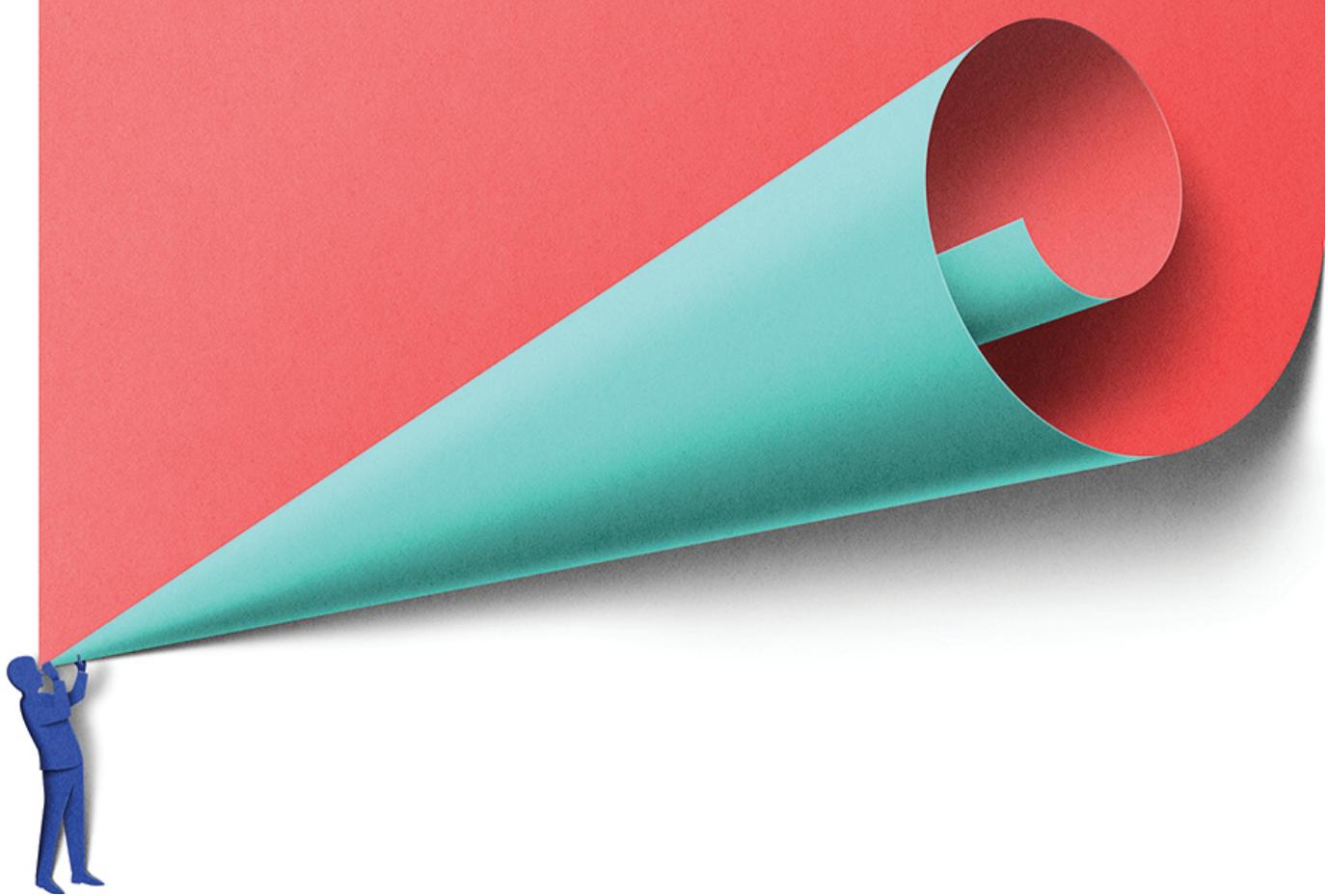
Political "factions" in the campus often run the risk of being taken a little too seriously. It does not take time for members to take personal disputes in a collectivist sense and act accordingly. With this as the case, disputes such as these often tend to boil over and snowball into full blown clashes, violent in their nature and immature with their logic. This aptly sums up the Jawahar fiasco.

This has led to the DOSW cancelling the elections and in constituting an interim SAC to carry on the workings till the next elections, prophesised to take place in March'17. This step may look reasonable, but has its own flaws. When we asked the DOSW on what basis the student representatives would be selected, there was no specific answer but vague mentions to analysing career plans and

the initiatives they had in mind. The question here is not that of the competency of the candidates, but rather of checks and balances to ensure it. No election will be perfect. However, it needs to be fair and transparent.

The current scenario:

Even though the system has been revamped and the atmosphere seems to favour competent candidates but there still remain some grave issues that need to be addressed, before we move onto the next election. Looking at the new election system, we spotted a few anomalies, and a multitude of illogical clauses making up our Election's code of conduct that insidiously hinder meritocratic politics. We approach these, one at a time and offer a few solutions to them.



Drawbacks of the current system:

A public addressal system (*or a lack thereof*):

Perhaps one of the biggest issues yet to be addressed, there exists no provision for candidates to put forward their opinions and debate openly about issues that plague the campus. The outlet for such an addressal system does exist now in the form of the ineffectual and seemingly fictional "Bhawan Addressal System". The system is a relic and allows for candidates to make speeches of a specified duration in each hostel, highlighting their credentials and plans.

However, the system is a complete failure, partly due to the apathy of the student body and partly due to the system it promises to be. The ADOSW mentions, "We tried allocating time slots to candidates for using the Bhawan addressal system. The observation was that the voter turnout was scant and uninterested."

Printed Posters:

Usage of printed posters for campaigning is prohibited, even though they are an extremely important way of communicating the agendas of a candidate to the masses. Instead, the code of conduct allows for hand written posters to be put up on stipulated places. The motive behind this restriction is a logical one - to ensure that the students do not overspend during the election process and the problems of accounting such a provision faces. However one does not have furrow their brows to come up with a solution to this problem, discussed in the later stages of our story.

Online Campaigning:

The code of conduct strictly prohibits online campaigning of any sort since it cannot be regulated and that there are no checks to arrest any unwanted developments, which might lead to the defamation of the college. In a scathing but true indictment, "An online portal is being worked on and we wouldn't mind going online after the college has attained a level of maturity befitting an IIT", says Prof. Nauriyal.

"An online portal is being worked on and we wouldn't mind going online after the college has attained a level of maturity befitting an IIT"

Prof. Nauriyal.

Unequal footing for the female candidates :

Since the girls have to be back in their own hostel by 11 pm, as well as cannot enter other hostels for campaigning as easily as the male candidates, they enter the ring with a handicap. The roots of this can be found in the age old issue surrounding the curfew on girls. With that in place, a female candidate can barely match the reach of a male one.

Limited Role of certain posts:

Certain posts at the hostel as well as the institutional level are viewed as redundant, as they have no assigned responsibility, and a very limited active role. The ADOSW's response is best stated in his own words:

"It is always the responsibility of the elected member to implement what he has planned. No one restricts the representatives to any particular activities. If the Secretary is enterprising enough, he can bring up new ideas, and if they are good we will go ahead with them. No post is irrelevant and if the students are ready to work on their posts then there is a lot that can be achieved. If someone just wants to enjoy the perks of being elected, he will not work. Furthermore, if you genuinely have a sound logic to refute some posts, do come to us and we will consider it accordingly. A similar thing happened with General Secretary (Finance) this time, as we felt that the budget didn't need a separate person just to handle the financial affairs and we got rid of the post."

Solutions:

They say learning never stops, and it shouldn't in this case either. We take this opportunity to examine our procedures to see where we lack, and how we can improve.



Soapboxes:

A soapbox is a central event where the contesting candidates come and ask relevant questions to each other. It misses the tension and heat of a debate all while having incisive questions asked among the candidates in the fray. When asked about a soapbox Prof. Indradeep Singh, ADOSW (Discipline) cited the trivial and workable details such as the unavailability of an adequate space and security issues as the roadblocks to conduct such an event. "The student population is around 8000. Considering that around 1500 turn up, we lack a place to accommodate them at once", says Prof. Indradeep Singh.

Comprehensive accounting of printed posters:

We suggest for the election commission to limit the following factors in the case of printed posters:

Content: A template can be followed which allows for a poster to display the candidate's credentials and plans, succinctly and concisely.

Numbers: A stipulated number of printed posters can be obtained signed duly by the commission.

Locations: Certain locations can be pre-decided, apart from the existing ones that would allow the posters to get considerable traction.

Accounting for the aforementioned factors immediately deals with the hazards posed by unsupervised spending and ensures effective campaigning. The election commission in IIT Bombay, allows for banners and flexes to be put up in pre decided spaces, which both curtails any extra expenditure, and gives equal footing to all the candidates involved in door-to-door campaigning. Each candidate is allowed to put up a 6'x3' flex, containing the candidate's photo and announcing the main points of their manifesto.

Centralised portals:

The fairness of not having discussions and campaigning on online mediums cannot be debated. Such discussions often venture into uncomfortable territories and cannot be stopped from snowballing into controversies. However, we understand that there is no online portal or forum where candidates can put up their manifestos, nor does the general public have any idea as to where they can find a copy of the manifesto. In other IIT's, provisions of online portals displaying each candidate's manifestos have proven to be an extremely efficient method to keep the masses updated on each candidate's modus operandi, and has helped the decision making process stay simple yet based on merit.

We suggest the creation and maintenance of a regularly updated web portal, upon which candidates can post their manifesto, a portal where the general electorate can compare the profiles of the candidates, as well as have a neutral third body asking the right questions to each candidate, and posting the answers onto this forum. As was mentioned by the DOSW,

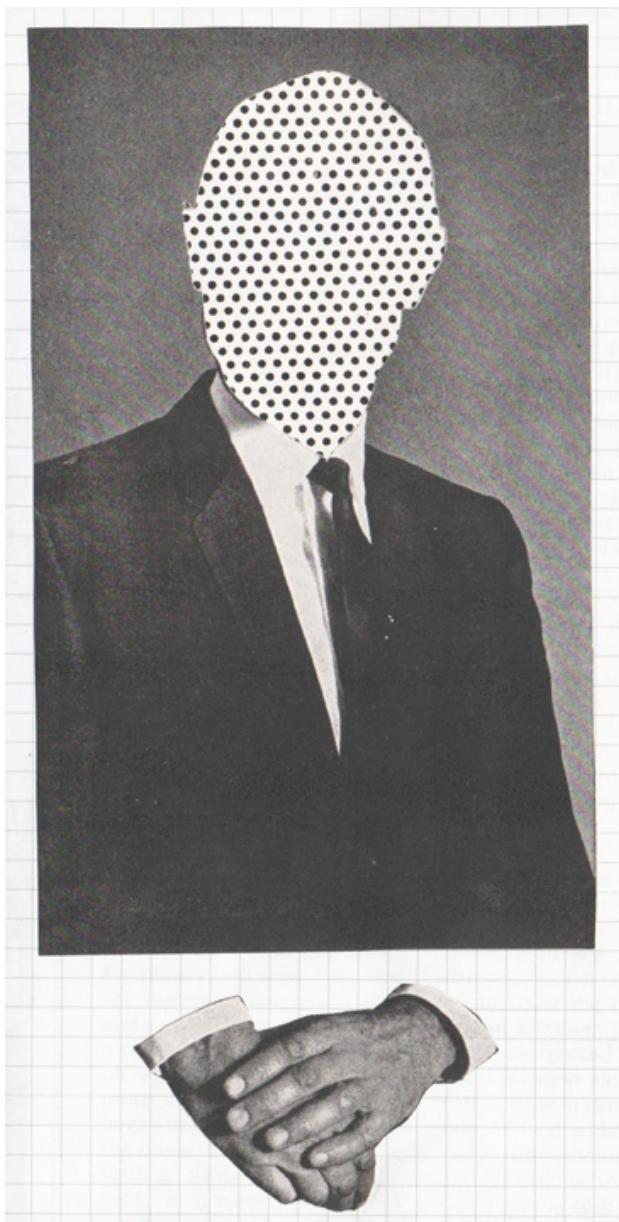


work on such a portal is already underway and we can hope for the aforementioned points to be present in one way or the other during the next elections.

Epilogue:

It is accepted that improvement in every system is an iterative process and each iteration takes time and thorough deliberation. The newly adopted system in IITR is a welcome step towards meritocratic politics and is still in its infancy. However, the general student populace is still largely apathetic towards the elections and some reforms need to be instituted to overcome that. With the perspective of history and an eye towards the future, we should anticipate what new potential challenges may lie over the horizon and consequently the reforms that need to be devised to ensure fair and transparent elections.

Phek News: Heart to heart with the admin of IITR confessions



Mr. Admin walks into the room with a black monkey-mask on. Our first instinct is that we are going to be mugged, but we realise that no one has any usable money left. He takes a seat and crosses his legs.

Hi! We're from Watch Ou..

Yeah yeah. I know. Can you get to it quickly? It's end-term season and the confession page gets really busy.

Right to it then. So, what do you think of IIT Roorkee. Like, what's your role here?

Oh. This place is full of cowards. All of them are wimps, I tell you! Opinionated wimps, though.

People here have a say in everything. They want to go on a rant against their professors, the mess food, the lecture timings, everything! They want to ask the guy on their floor who keeps playing loud music to shut up. They want to ask the pretty girls out for a cup of coffee. But, they also want to keep their identity hidden. Which is where I come in. I'm the channel that gets messages through to the receiver. I'm here to make sure that all this is done.

Does it get stressful, this job?

Don't get me started on this! It gets irritating when people start messaging the page with death threats if you haven't posted confessions over a span of 2 days. These futile attempts to menace end up messing up my ability to pay attention to those presentations in class (not that I want pay attention). It's funny how their haystack filled brains strive on the daily dose of who's hating, who's dating, who's crushing and who's blushing. God, I wish I could get a break! I mean, don't get me wrong, I love this job, but even I have tutorials and assignments to copy!

Must be exhausting, copying and pasting all those confessions.

Oh you smart guys with your sarcasm. Let me tell you how tiring this responsibility is. I have to manually check and censor each of the confessions. It is almost impossible to comprehend the English. Itz jst rndm cllckn of alphbts sumtymz whch dnt evn mk snse.

Recently, I found out the outrageous fact that the administration keeps a tabs on the kids by checking my page. I don't want to put my users, however stupid they might be, into trouble because #brocode.

Also, there exists a range of confessions which are not meant to greet the desperate eyes of the IITR junta, because a few secrets are meant to be buried. Thus, these end up being filtered out.

(rather excitedly) What are those secrets?

(Eyes in those monkey masks grow wider. We jump in our seats and hurriedly mutter "Never mind" and move on to the next question)

Um, what do you think of these “lovers” posting confessions?

I've always been a hopeless romantic. I admit, I've had my own share of lovestruck semesters here. I have been rendered speechless in front of the love of my life a couple of times. What can you say! Some of us are just too shy. Does that mean that we are incapable of love? True, we're awkward, and end up blabbering nervously strung together sentences and pick-up lines we plucked off the internet in front of our crush while our palms get sweaty and our heart pounds, resonating it's beats through our chest, but does that mean we can't give the girl of our dreams the happiness she deserves? At IITR Confessions, we aim to give our timid, socially clumsy brothers a chance at love.

(We won't lie. We teared up a bit right here.)

But there are so many people posting fake confessions about their friends! How do you deal with that?

It saddens me, to be honest, that today, the sanctity of a confession page is disregarded completely. I mean, seriously? IIT Roorkee needs to take love seriously. And as the admin, I'll work ceaselessly until the fifteen thousand followers of our Facebook page know how important anonymous revelations of love are.

You don't have fifteen thousand followers. It's barely even ten thousand!

Still more than you guys have, right?

That hurt. Moving on. What is the recruitment process like for becoming the admin?

We get into a group of 15 people and grill the prospective candidates.

Really?

No, that's just dumb! Our recruitment is an analogous to Darwin's theory of natural selection. We handpick our candidates using an algorithm which has been circulating in the confession community for generations. These potential candidates are put through carefully drafted

rigorous linguistic, semantic and analytical challenges. The refining process goes something like the following.

Right off the bat, we ask our prospective candidates to provide us the juiciest gossip of the campus. (*Yes, we need to judge their definition of juicy.*)

We weed out a huge chunk of admin-hopefuls here. You'd be surprised how very unfit people at IITR are at being paps.

Next, we ask our contenders to process some really bad English.

(*V wnt 2 c if u cn hw hi iz ur glas ceelng*)

Then, we..

(*Right here, the admin saw us excitedly take notes. He stopped.*)

Excuse me! We'd like to keep everything under the cloak of secrecy and we expect everyone to appreciate that. Are you actually naive enough to believe that I'd let you reveal my recruitment procedure to the entire campus? Come on!

We apologize. Although, could you name a couple of people who've been admins?

I don't remember a lot of them. Though, Amit Singhal was an admin back in his time.

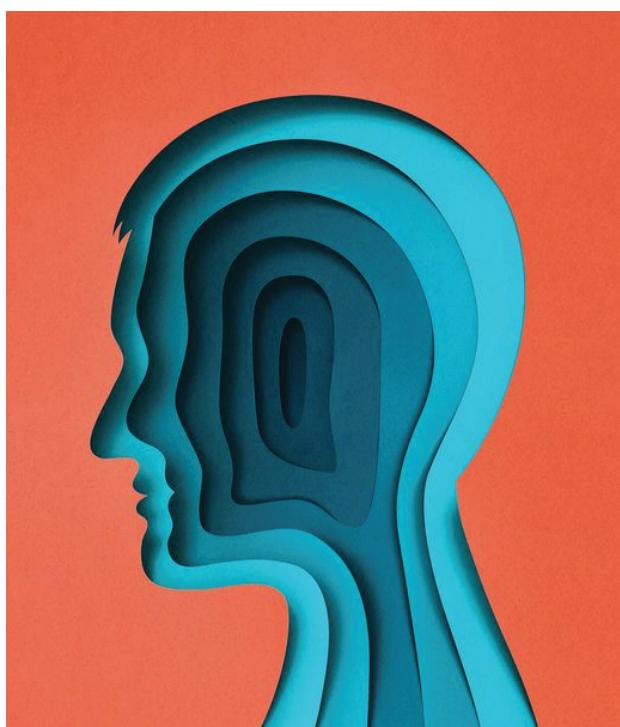
No he wasn't! There wasn't even a Facebook page then! There wasn't even a 'Facebook' then!

I see you've done your research. Nice. Ok no he wasn't. But he keeps hacking into our page every now and then. We have to change our password every two days!

Well, I guess that's the end of this, then. One last question though. What do you think of Watch Out!?

Well, there was this outrageous rumor going around in campus that Watch Out! was behind this page, but I assure you, you guys are not cool enough to do it.

Can we trust ourselves?



"The problem with people is that they are so stupid. So stupid that they have no idea how stupid they are."

John Cleese

Trust is a fundamental cog in the machinery that drives the world. We trust drivers to follow traffic lights and not bump into cars. We trust our politicians to make the right decisions. However, the grounds on which it is built are largely unknown – our decision to trust others is perhaps a subconscious, impulsive one, acting more as false assurances than absolute security against potential deviations. When weighed collectively with the consideration that our senses (and what they perceive thereof) are not “facts” as we wrongly attribute them to be, an unsettling question presents itself: Can we trust ourselves?

George Orwell floated such an idea before the world in 1984. By tampering with evidence and indulging in propaganda, Big Brother is successful in reinforcing the desired belief in the subjects’ mind. Elizabeth Loftus, who specialises in false memories, has shown that they are easily planted. In her TED talk, “How reliable is your memory?”, she explains how false memories are responsible for a three quarters of wrongful convictions and other bizarre, irrational beliefs and occurrences that constitute our identity.

Memory, she states, is unlike a recording device which stores information without modification; the brain is plastic, and accounts evolve over time into stories that distort the truth to great extents. She attributes this phenomenon to misinformation and the subconscious or unconscious acceptance of memory (or other sensory stimulus) as fact.

Oftentimes, hypocritical behaviour is foreign to our awareness. Christened the “Actor-observer bias”, this phenomenon encapsulates how our angry disapproval persists despite the probable circumstances under which a fellow human being has committed an infarction (say jumped a signal) – but when the observer becomes the doer, he feels that his act was justified. Here, empathy is stifled by ignorance of the said principle, rendering us not completely impartial, in contrast to what we tend to believe.

In 1999, Dunning and Kruger presented their hypothesis, seconding Bukowski, who had previously remarked: “The problem with the world is that the intelligent people are full of doubts while the stupid ones are full of confidence”. By checking the consistency of actual test scores of candidates against their own predictions, they concluded that high-ability individuals underestimate themselves, while those with low abilities overestimate themselves. This illusory superiority is a manifestation of the lack of metacognitive abilities; i.e. people are unable to recognize their incompetency.

Every fact or principle was once an assumption; unbounded scepticism is hardly helpful in the establishment of such bases, which the civilized world believes to be true. This said, perfect trust is a symptom of ignorance. The longer one lives, the more selective they become about who they trust. Trust is bestowed upon others because we believe we are intelligent and capable enough to make such choices; however, in light of the above considerations, it seems that the foundations of this faith are built on the marshy lands of our perceptions and memories, which are, in and of themselves, unreliable and fallible.

Big Story: Because, a word to the whys: Academic system at IITR

As the oldest technical institution of the nation, IIT Roorkee has had its share of upheavals to provide the best possible atmosphere to its students. A crucial vertical which has seen some rather welcome changes has been the approach towards academics, both by the students and the administration alike. However, a lot of facets still remain unaddressed and neglected.

The pivotal variables of the academic system include the Teaching Assistants, the feedback systems, and how the audit, minors and electives are dealt with. As one delves deep into these factors, it turns out that the system out here suffers a tonne of downfalls in regards to them.

Considering the fact that IIT Roorkee is one of the most prestigious institutions of the country, it only makes sense to draw parallels between the counterparts it has in IITB, IITD and IITKGP, among others. Since all of these institutions equally depend on the heavy support that the MHRD provides, we can get rid of the shortcomings that we face at IIT Roorkee through a careful comparative study.

Undergraduate TAs:

The course-structure of almost every major subject dedicates an hour a week for a supplementary tutorial class, which is conducted by a Teaching Assistant (TA). In contrast to IITB, where even the B.Tech. students are encouraged to nominate themselves for the position in some departments, the decision ultimately lying in the hands of the professor, the TAs at IITR are mostly graduate students or PhD fellows. A professor here also runs the risk of complaints being filed against him if he nominates an undergraduate for a TA post. Such a system fore stalls a potent senior-junior interaction on academic fronts, and as it turns out, compromises on the quality of teaching. Students also have a monetary incentive to take on the role of a TA.

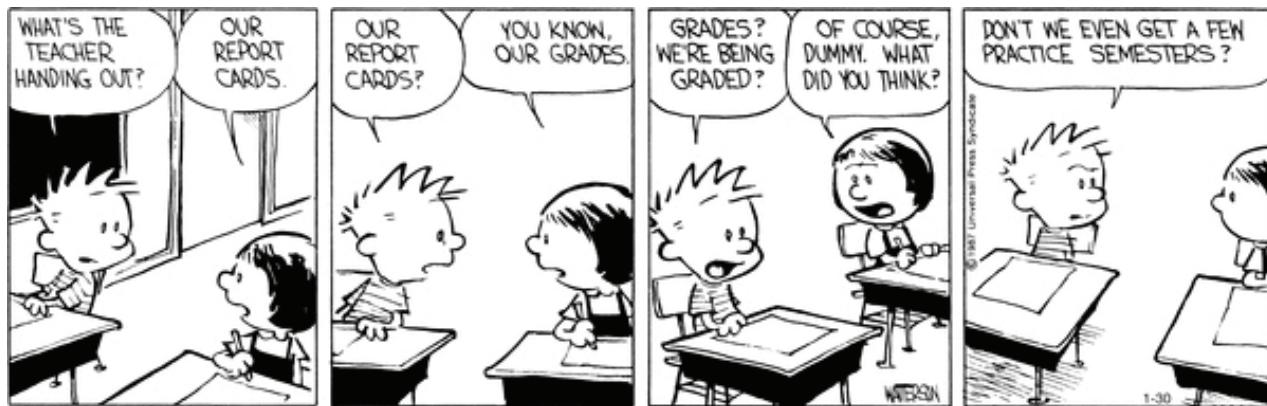
IITG, too, allows for undergrads to be TAs, however it has been observed that people are satisfied with the M.Tech./PhD people working as TAs. Such a system, however, ensures that both kinds of TAs are tried out and on the basis of the comfort levels, a student-friendly structure is devised.

Feedback System:

IIT Roorkee has tried to implement feedback mechanisms that invite suggestions and inputs from students about the professor and the course they took up at the end of the semester.

Apparently other IITs follow a similar suit as IITR, to quite an extent. However, it turns out IITG, and IITM have well laid systems when it comes to feedbacks. Proper professor ratings are performed, and professors are changed if a certain minimum rating is not fulfilled by the professor. However at IITR, very much like IITB, IITKGP and IITK, students take up feedback as an obligation. There has been no formal action taken against a particular professor for not meeting a certain benchmark of standards. This further hampers the element of choice that students of a lot of other institutes enjoy when they select their professors.

However, there is a channel working at in all the sister-IITs, which compensates for the lack of effectiveness that the feedback system has. Student councils, with names depending on the case in point, are present in all the sister-IITs. These councils are departmental, and have year representatives, from each year of UG, PG, and PhD studies. They tend to meet up on a regular basis with the HoD and a certain number of faculty members. A number of concerns are discussed, wherein the discussion if forwarded by the council, is taken up by a higher authority, and if the authority denies the proposal, then a proper justification is provided. The council at IIT-Kgp are known to have brought about a lot



many reforms, with some going as far as getting the course structure changed. They arrange alumni meets and internship talks, which is something every student wants to participate in. Such a structure is something IITR lacks. It should become a compulsory rule for each

department to have such a council. ECE and Electrical Departments do have such councils called DSC, i.e. Departmental Students' Council.

Minors and Extra courses:

In a nutshell, you get special recognition on your degree for the minor courses that you've completed. The credit courses have an impact on your overall grades which the audit ones do not.

When enquired about the nature of academics, the general answer is that the system isn't marks-oriented, with IITM people specifically saying that CGPA is just a number, research is the only thing that is cared about at IITM. At IITK, IITM and IITG, one can take up any elective, or any course in general, right after their first year. However IITB and IITKGP function quite the same as IITR. Non-humanities electives/extra courses are allowed only after the second year. Though one strong point that other IITs do hold is that they allow for audit courses after the first semester itself. Audit courses allow for general exploration without stressing about one's grade. IITR has rules restricting students from even taking up audit courses in the second year. Beyond the second year, an audit course becomes obsolete to quite an extent, because one has the option of taking up a course as a credit course if his total credits don't exceed twenty

four.

As a student, you're free to audit any course. Minors involve a certain number of credits and demand certain amount of time, but audits are freely available. Unless there are constraints like an overflow in the batch, the faculty advisor thinking you're overloaded or if your CGPA takes a backseat, you're free to go for an audit.

"We reached out to Prof. Jaikrishnan U Nair, Department of Electrical Engineering, IIT Bombay for his opinion on audit courses and minors. To quote him, "Audit courses are no good! I tell all my students to appear for exams, because that is what really helps. In an audit course, whether you come or not, it makes no difference!". Prof. Nair felt that while minors do not convey a precise objective, they provide the student with the flexibility to explore. As for honors, he adds, "Honors are looked at positively indeed. Employers actually feel that the student has gone a step ahead and done something extra, which is good. But all in all, it shouldn't be pursued at the cost of one's CGPA."

Course structure:

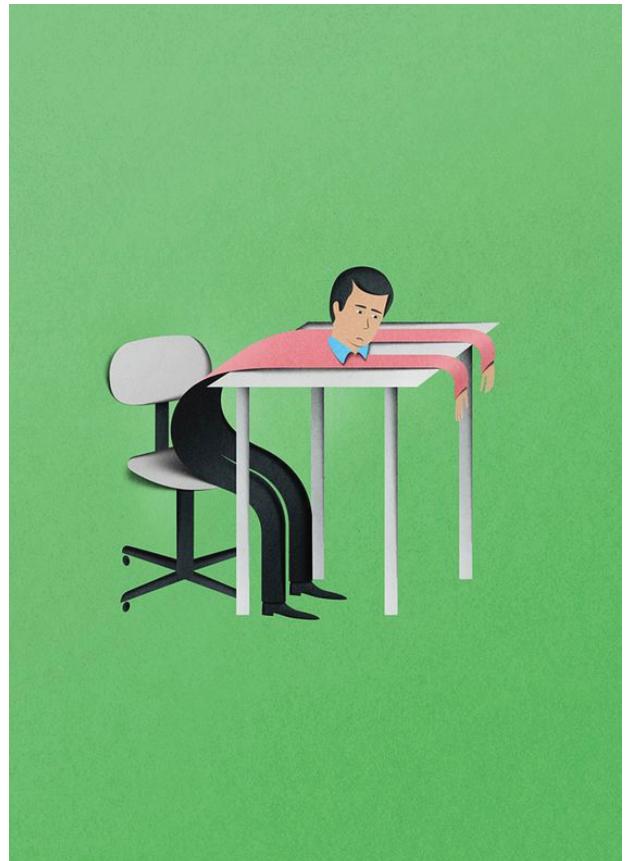
The course structure at IIT Roorkee is pretty straightforward. During the first year the number of common courses between all the different streams is at its pinnacle and it branches off into more specialised courses from there on. The more you probe into a succeeding semester the more you find yourself delving into the core aspects of your respective stream.

They try to provide with a full fledged and sound industrial knowledge but then again the fact that lies within is that in depth learning depends on the faculties who teach the subject. The main dilemma with faculties is the strength. Faculty members are not enough to support the whole curriculum and hence have to teach subjects out of their interest domain which creates a lack in quality teaching.

A significant part of the courses in every stream are quite irrelevant and redundant. Engineering drawing is considered a constant pain. IITs are supposed to be research institutes but a massive chunk of the population here take up jobs at various MNCs. The courses hardly cater to the industrial needs and hence most of the times the white collar recruiters are not interested in investing and hence there is a setback in the number of placements.

A fair share of the students presently at IIT Roorkee sympathise with the fact that most of the courses are relevant, but totally obsolete and outdated. They are not in synchronization with the ongoing changes in the industry. Revisiting previously taught courses becomes kind of important when one knows that they won't be able to recall most of the stuff at a later point of time. When asked about, the flow and the structure of courses seemed quite satisfactory in almost every stream with minute changes required which on the whole is a lot less impacting. While the department courses are quite sorted the minor courses happen to be unsorted and haphazard. The order creates a problem when there is a requirement for a prerequisite when opting for a particular minor. The idea of taking up a Computer Science course, just for the sake of putting it up on your CV and perhaps landing a job in the same field is quite counter productive.

The general opinion about practical labs is that even they are outdated and have very few areas of application. The infrastructure as well as the



study material. They don't serve the basic obligation of providing an industrial point of view and also they are quite less numbered.

Special Note : Programming has become a very principal need today, not only with respect to placements but even with respect to non-CS branches. Fields like Computational Metallurgy, Bioinformatics, etc require a decent background in coding and hence somewhere it should be inculcated in every stream.

Epilogue:

The academic system at IITR is definitely not ideal and as it seems, will not be for a while. But there seems to be some progress (however minute) towards a better structure starting with the reforms of 2014. Change comes from questioning, which is something that we can commit to.

Career Series : Dr. Lovneesh Chanana

An engineer himself, Dr. Chanana serves as a government advisor on e-governance, business development, consulting and capacity building. Having worked with giants in the industry including the likes of IBM and SAP, he expounds on how potential collaborations of industry and academia can offer a goldmine of research opportunities for engineering grads.

In common parlance, can you explain to us what e-governance is and how it influences our lives?

Dr. Chanana - Technology offers you the opportunity to change processes and reach out to people, which was never feasible before. It offers a radical opportunity for transformation. Application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to the whole process of government service delivery is called e-governance.

How did e-governance suddenly become an area of academic and practitioner interest?

Dr. Chanana - There is huge scope for improvement in efficiency in all the sectors of service. We have different types of service techniques - Government to Citizen (G to C), Government to Business (G to B), Government to Government (G to G), like in the case of a passport application, and Government to employee (G to E). These services are innumerable and they tend to cater the needs of countless people. This makes the entire procedure of providing services to the last man standing really complex. The technology offers a huge potential in making all of these complex procedures easier. This is why this area came under exploration.

How can e-governance be of interest to students?

Dr. Chanana - Look at all the services that the government of India is providing. You can use aadhar card for innumerable procedures. One



can get their passport in 10 days, one can avail LPG subsidy, and what not. But look at the back end of it all. We have to cater to a population of more than 90 crore people. Think of the amount of data analysis required, the database system's capacity and complexity, the level of difficulties in ensuring speedy services with such loads of data. It offers immense work opportunities for a student interested in IT.

What is your take on the role of industries in pushing academia towards research?

Dr. Chanana - The industry has to deal with real life issues every single day. These issues are of huge vitality to the industry's progress, and with which the country's progress is attached. If the industries are to allot such issues in the form of projects directly to students it'll be of immense help to the students because it'll help them develop a practical sense out of the theoretical knowledge that they are already exposed to.

In USA, companies tend to allot projects to students via professors. If these projects prove successful then many-a-times they are taken up by the students as their PhD programs with funding given by the companies. Why don't we get to hear of such opportunities in India?



Dr. Chanana - Well, the thing is the initiatives are already in full swing. The current procedure is to establish centers of excellence inside the institute and provide them an issue to work on. The institute carries out the research work and then reverts with all their efforts established into a prototype. This prototype is then taken up by the industry and used for further establishments. IIT Madras for instance has shown really good output.

What is the industry's stand on the current education system offering enough in terms of practical exposure to students?

Dr. Chanana - We expect that the people that we hire, when they come to us and we discuss with them the issues pertaining to IT and other fields of computer science, they understand what we are saying. Now if we are to argue with someone who has never had an experience with IT, and all he knows is how to code, then that person is not a good fit. We have to impose restrictions. The issue is people still think of technology as specialization. But technology is no more a specialization. It is a commodity. It is taken for

granted. And thus people don't realize that no matter what field you are in you can always mix up non-core areas and pursue them full time. I myself am a Production and Industrial engineer, but I work for SAP, an IT company.

Do you have any message for the student body of IITR?

Dr. Chanana - Take pride in yourself and be proud of your capabilities. Don't be in a hurry. Think of this as a career for a lifetime, not a single job. In industry the golden rule is that there'll always be at least one person who earns a salary higher than you. The moment you start comparing, your relationship with your peer group gets strained and your performance is affected.

In conversation with Director, IIT Roorkee



Can you recount some major projects undertaken during your tenure?

Two or three major changes things that I can say, one is the influx of young faculty members- the average age going down from 52 to under 42 is huge.

Second thing that I think that has changed is, slowly but surely, a research culture is creeping in. The number of PhD students that came here were about 750.

And graduating were about 120-130. This year we have about 1600+ PhD students, and the ones graduating, around 292. The number of sponsored research projects have grown, although not much as I'd like to.

Five years in an institution is a very small time. You can't make large changes when because you make very large changes, there's always this chaos that accompanies them. And I hope that the Advaita ERP programme which is trying to get everything online and connected to each other, will have a long lasting impact. So, I think I'll probably mention these three as far as the subject matters.

You have served as a dean in IITB for six years. What difference do you find in the administrative functioning in Roorkee and in Bombay?

The difference between IIT Roorkee and IIT Bombay of that time is that the Director does not matter. There's a lot of delegation, of authority, and responsibility. The authority delegation, I've done over here as well. The responsibility part that the heads of the departments think about their departments and work towards its betterment and not think of themselves remains.

Today IIT Bombay is very different. For small small things, it becomes so complicated. I would say that between IIT Bombay and IIT Roorkee of today, IIT Roorkee is the better place because it's moving towards more openness, more flexibility whereas IIT Bombay is going towards more rigidity. So, I think they are going on different trajectories. Where we are relative to each other, I can't tell because I don't spend too much time in Bombay.

We still have some archaic rules, a curfew on girls and a relatively rigid academic system. What are the roadblocks to changing these at IITR?

About three years ago, I completely changed the academic system. I brought in flexibility, and whether the flexibility in reality, is happening is something that I don't know. What we are trying to make is that we are trying to do changes from institute centric to student centric.

Unfortunately, students are not, a very enlightened lot. The fact that each one of the undergrad students can choose his or her own path is something that I do agree on paper looks beautiful. There are certain hitches, that are going to come, but I think with what we are trying to do, that academic flexibility will come along. It may take two to three years for systems to change.

One of the first things I did when I came back here, is try to say let's look at the curfew of girls? Let's do something about it. Immediately, another section of girls came in and told me that, "Sir, we feel safe being locked up at night." I said 'Boss!'. The point I am trying to make is that one group of girls came and said, "Sir, we want to remove the restrictions". I said, "Sure! I think it's criminal".

But then, almost half an hour later, another batch of girl students came in and said, "Sir please don't change it, our parents are very happy." I can't handle this, because I do not understand this. IIT Roorkee has surprised me over and over and over again.

IITR has been consistently ranked as the sixth best. Taking the ranking at face value, where do you think lies the difference between us and the original five IITs?

The thinking process of everybody, including the students. I blame students, mostly. The last time I went to Saharanpur campus I told the students there that you are not IIT students; what you did IIT students would never do. So I think, because to a certain extent that at all levels, this place still does not believe that it's an IIT. And that's where the history comes in, right?

I'm trying to make the students run things. I've seen that even among a lot of students, self interest becomes paramount. Over here the mindset is not about the institution but ourselves. I've mentioned this to the faculty, I have mentioned it to my Deans, and all my students that self-interest determines what you are. I just lay my case. If 8000 students all work together who can do anything to them. But, even a batch of 60 students there's no unity.

I'm telling you frankly, IIT Roorkee easily, with almost no effort can be the third best IIT. Why, because IIT Bombay and Delhi are currently very well established. Those two IITs are on autopilot. In the sense that you don't have to tell the faculty anything, you don't have to tell students anything. Everybody does what is best for the institution. They do sponsored research of almost a hundred and fifty crore rupees a year. The ranking is fundamentally about being known in the world. Let me tell you how the students are different from the other IITs? *In other IITs, General Secretary banta hai to kisi ko pakad ke banate hain wahan pe. Koi banana hi nahi chahta. Yahaan pe, I still remember, about three years ago where the guy who became the SAC ka kya hai President, usko kandhe pe leke you people were announcing.*

Delhi University hai kya hai yaar. I mean, it was a guy who was like, and he was being taken around by students and I was like, kya hai yaar.

It is every student for himself or herself. That old culture is still here. I'm shocked, even in IIT system I feel someone calling a one year senior "Sir". That used to be for officers! The main thing IIT Roorkee lacks is a todo attitude. Go out, and tell the people that we will do it for you. We will work with you. These are the areas that are our strengths and that's all for this this and this purpose. That I think is the key to IIT Roorkee being third very easily nothing, no doubt.

Undergraduate research at IITR pales in comparison to the other IITs. We have a minimal number of students taking up research as a career. How can we turn this around?

Undergraduate research is a tautology. Undergraduates cannot do research. Because to do research, you have to gain so much knowledge and you cannot. What can an undergraduate do? Undergraduates have ideas. They need to solve a problem. That is something that cannot be individually pursued.

Form teams. Solve problems. If you look at it, that's what I was trying to tell the students also. Do something. Get an approach. Try to solve a problem. Research leave it to the Phd students. If you look elsewhere, none of them are doing research. If they are doing research it is stupid. Because they don't have any knowledge. You people don't have knowledge. But you have ideas. Ideas do not require knowledge.

What is the biggest regret from your tenure here at IIT Roorkee?

I tried to create leaders among students, but I failed. I have never said no to anything. I am the only director who has given airfare to students to go for inter IIT. The only thing I have asked them is to bring the general championship, which hasn't happened in the past 5 years. You guys are Watch Out! You should go and hit everyone with



your work. That's what IITs are about. You come here, the world is yours. Every time I interact with students working in Thomso, Cognizance I tell them "Karo, kuch karo". They have done wonderfully in terms of bringing sponsorship and all. When Techfest started, it became international. But Cognizance is still a regional fest. Aspiration is what I want my students to have. Go and become global leaders. Be the best in what you do. Screw the system, yaar. In the system or among students there would always be good people and bad people.

It has been established that a major reason for Roorkee's undoing is the student populace. How has the response from the students been?

We opened a tinkering lab. I thought there will be a mass of students trying to figure out when it is going to open. The tinkering lab at IIT Bombay is completely run by students. I asked the Director, IIT Bombay, "Has the satellite gone up?". He had no clue and had to call and ask a student to find out the details. People should start taking initiatives. A lot of things have been started by students, but they lack continuity. For example, groups like FSAE, Robocon etc.

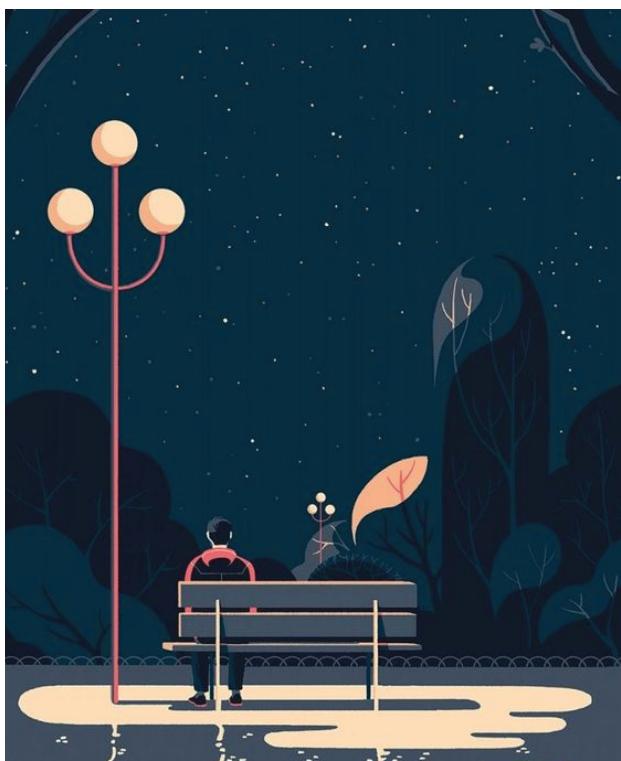
I had expected that over five years, their race car would start winning after accumulating knowledge over these years. You should be going forward. The students should start working around their ideas.

How many students have even tried to find out what the faculty works on? I have been saying this to the faculty as well when asked the question what the institute does for them. The institute gives you a place to stay, world class research facilities, a salary. Who is stopping you from doing things? The point I am trying to make is, the efforts have to be started from individuals. Students are more interested in the bandwidth of the internet here. What is the opportunity you grab here? The speed of the internet. Here people complain about the number of companies visiting the campus. More than 240 companies visited last year which rivals any other IITs. Do you know what recruiters say about IIT Roorkee? They say that they see a remarkable difference between people of IITR and other IITs.

Can you complete the joke, "A Director walks into a bar..."?

Everybody goes out. A director walks alone. So even if he goes into a bar he's alone.

On Solitude



"Solitude matters, and for some people, it's the air they breathe" - Susan Cain in her book Quiet.

Loner. Introvert. Recluse. All of these words have stopped being mere adjectives. Rather, people who choose to consort with solitude have been treated with such labels, and with every shred of distaste too.

So familiar we are with the hackneyed idea that humans are a 'social species' that nowadays, even the atheists take it for granted. Even though the theory of how the prehistoric men managed their food, shelter and all their basic necessities by trading and cooperating with one another holds merit but there is no evidence to suggest that in today's world, being more social correlates to higher success in life. Yet people somehow loathe the idea that someone prefers his/her own company to theirs. Susan Cain rightfully pointed out in her Ted Talk, "You might still feel a pang of guilt when you decline a dinner invitation in favour of a good book. Or maybe you like to eat alone in restaurants and could do without the pitying looks from fellow diners. Or you're told that you're 'in your head too much', a phrase that's often deployed against the quiet and cerebral. Or maybe there's another word for such people: thinkers." Who knows

how the world would have been now if people like Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi, Charles Darwin, Nikola Tesla were deprived of their solitude.

James bond for one is on our side of the camp who explains why the contemporary world so blatantly chooses to ignore the benefits of solitude. When the antagonist accused him of being a puppet in Government's hands, he simply quipped, "I never stop to think about it." We too live a life, like Childe Roland in Stephen King's world where we are endlessly climbing one stair after another in the tower and we never stop. Why is the idea of solitude so repulsive? Maybe the idea that solitude may lead to inner peace is jarring to us at some level. Or maybe our ideas of peace don't necessarily resonate with the conventional one, the one that says that we attain a state of peace when our brain orchestrates with our conscience. Paulo Coelho, in one of his blogs, hints that maybe solitude is scary for some as it might reveal all those mysteries we've suppressed inside our subconscious mind. Maybe we are too scared of the fact that if we do 'get in touch with our inner selves', it'll just wreak havoc within this perfect little world adorned with ignorance. Solitude scares us. And like everything that has threatened to crumble our castle of comfort, we've treated it with the most human medication of all. We loathe everyone who is brave enough to try it. And it has worked, too.

For thinkers, solitude is a functional need or to put it in a hyperbole, the air that they breathe. Contrastingly, for idlers, solitude is their escape or a way to avoid the burdens that comes with life. Any blockhead without much cognitive effort will come to the realization that the negative connotation associated with solitude is because of these idlers. Especially since the idler in question could be suffering from depression and perhaps at this point of time even contemplating the harrowed s-word. And of course since there is only one way to differentiate between a thinker and an idler, it is sort of a dictum that only productive idlers are the think

ers. In other words, we have handed over the luxury of being alone only to those who come out of wilderness with a materialistic wonder that is validated by the self-proclaimed critics. Case in point? Pink Floyd's Syd Barrett has his hiatus glorified today because of the mesmerizing songs he wrote in recluse. Without that, he probably would have slipped into oblivion as someone who had a nervous breakdown en route to what might have been one of the most illustrious careers in music. If you're having trouble with this example, picture this. How many scorns have been directed at the guy in the room next to you who doesn't entertain the idea of parties and late-night gaming sessions, but instead choose to indulge in his own collection of novels? How would you feel about this 'choice' of his to abstain from all of this tomfoolery if you found out a year later that he came up with an idea to, say, avoid global warming, or perhaps rewrite the whole search engine algorithm Google has had?

Until now.



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