

# WATCH OUT

*Cover Story*

## The Alumni Effect

*Big Story*

### Funding Your Extracurriculars

*Feature*

### Feedback for Feedback Forms



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# TOUGH LOVE

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Our institute, in itself, is an assertive embodiment of a community craving change. Since the both of us took the helm of Watch Out last April, we've tried to capitalise on just that. As the (self-proclaimed) voice of the student fraternity, Watch Out has had a conscientious - albeit a fairly debatable - responsibility in the institute, which is something we'd love to elaborate on through our inaugural address as its chief-editors.

While efficacious information dissemination certainly features in our agenda, we must admit that it has never been our premier priority. The title of a 'news agency' was a misnomer that we anchored to our name for too long, and it was about time that we got rid of it. We've fervently maintained that our institute does not need another information bulletin, nor does it need another forum for relaying periodic notifications. More than anything else, our campus needs an actively meddlesome (and a borderline nosy) participant in its affairs.

*Enter Watch Out.*

As self-righteous a claim as this might be, there'sa reason we've liked to stand by it. You see, it's no secret that in spite of being a part of an institute with a rich legacy, we all still have a long way to go. As a crucial part of an increasingly dynamic educational environment, our institute - and everyone associated withit - ought to keep pushing the bar. We have to ceaselessly strive for better standards of academics, smarter representatives, all-inclusive campus policies, and increased transparency in the official proceedings - among other things.

In more ways than not, this likens our institute to a prodigal teenager who could really use some tough love to keep it from straying off the track; and that is where a students' body like ours comes in. While proudly glorifying everything that IIT Roorkee has strived to achieve, we see ourselves as the restlessly picky and opinionated commentators working towards the earnest cause of further elevating the stature of our institute in our own way: one article at a time.

We realise the indifference of most towards print media and its ability to bring the all-elusive 'change'. However, we believe that sometimes, starting the conversation

might just be that one mutinous step needed. Recognising how difficult it is for just a small bunch of students who meet at the Senate Steps every other week to do that, we have opened Watch Out up to invite contributions from everyone associated with the institute, and hence give you a platform to opine on the matters that matter. We'd like to humbly reiterate that we could use all the help we get, and you too, dear reader, have a potentially monumental role in the pursuit we're talking about, and we'd love to have you indulge in this exercise.

Through this issue, too, we have tried to discuss some topics relevant to our institute, while complementing them with a host of editorials. The Cover Story of this issue features an elaborate disquisition on how our institute is working towards establishing a more fruitful relationship with its alumni, while the Big Story probes how the portion of your fees dedicated towards extracurricular activities is utilised. We also write about the prospects of a revamped professor feedback system at our institute, and through our editorials, discuss abstractions like absurdism, the power of dark humour, and the application of game theory to real life.

We're extremely excited to bring this issue to you, and we're sure you'll have fun reading through it.

Criminally optimistic,



**Aditya Rathi & Aditya Peshin**  
*Chief Editors, 2017-18*

*p.s. We're not huge fans of feedbacks and criticism. However, we've been told that they would, in the longer run, only do us good! Feel free to share your thoughts with us by sending an email to [watchout.iitr@gmail.com](mailto:watchout.iitr@gmail.com), or drop us a message to our Facebook page to tell us how you feel!*

# DANK SIDE OF THE MEME

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Unless you have been living under a rock for the last couple of years (which, after all that has been going on, wouldn't really be a bad idea), you've probably come across the term 'dank'. This word - which literally means nastily damp and cold - was originally used to describe cellars, vaults, or basements that were unfavourable to humans. Later, the word gained usage in the marijuana subculture to refer to sticky, stinky and high quality cannabis (which is definitely not what piqued our interest in this subject). Owing to this definition, the word started to be used as a reference to something 'cool' or 'awesome' in modern contexts, and most popularly, as slang to describe memes.

*p.s. A meme (pron: meem/मीम) is an image, a video, or just a set of text with random humorous content, or a reference to popular culture. It is widely used online as a medium of humour, and knowledge on the subject would go a long way towards substantiating your claim of not having lived under a rock for the last couple of years.*

Technically speaking, however, 'dank memes' aren't necessarily good memes. Originally, this word was used to describe hackneyed and overused media, and served as a sarcastic remark at something that wasn't really funny. However, as is the case with majority of the internet lingo,

the original meaning of this word was squashed and what remained was adulterated debris.



In recent times, a lot of humour - and hence, a lot of memes - have touched upon very sensitive topics like depression, racism, and sexism, and have taken a jibe at almost anything that would be offensive in an otherwise censored environment. This category of memes has, oddly enough, amused a lot of its audience, and the irony that they invoke have deemed these jokes to be referred to as 'dank'. Necessarily, a 'dank' remark is an opinion that you'd normally find unpleasant, but when disguised as a joke or a quip, you can't help but laugh off.

Why, however, have we been this welcoming of dark and offensive humour, and let it become one of the major mediums

of social change?

Humour, in general, has always been known for the strong and positive effects it has on our bodies. It has been scientifically proven that the after-effects of laughter include slowed heart rate, lower blood pressure, and overall, a mellow physiology. Laughter leads to reduction in cortisol and epinephrine, both hormones that are released due to stress, which explains why some people unconsciously laugh during times of anxiety and grief. This is the aspect that dark humour attempts to exploit: extracting laughs by poking fun at the more sensitive things in life. It is the absurdity and the offensive nature of dark humour that tickles us. Beneath this arrogant and witty garb lies the intention to talk about issues that people wouldn't usually accept as a part of their lives; all this without sounding too preachy.

For obvious reasons, the community that appreciates dark humour shall always be a minority. There will always be those who are easily offended, there will always be comedians getting sued, and there will always be people who acknowledge the awkwardness or uneasiness that comes with a dank joke; the humour of a dark joke might not be greater than the disgust it inspires. Nevertheless, the advent of dark humour has made social and political challenges seem like mere jokes, and hence, somewhat easier to address.





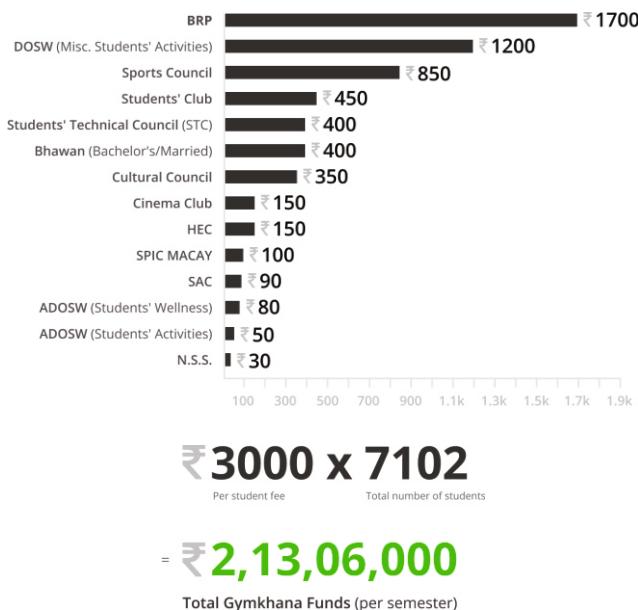
Every semester, every student of IIT Roorkee each pays a certain amount towards the 'Gymkhana Activities' of the institute. This amount, which sums up to Rs. 6000 every academic year (Rs. 3000 every semester), is meant to cover the expenditure of all the extracurricular activities in the campus. With an approximate student strength of seven thousand this amount translates to an annual budget of over Rs. 4 crores.

## BIG STORY

*Funding Your  
Extracurriculars*

As substantial as the amount might seem, a perfect testimony to the importance of such an extensive budget was given by the former Director of IIT Roorkee, Dr. Pradipita Banerjee. During the orientation ceremony of the batch of 2016-17, he said: “*Students, when you go out in public, you wear a suit to create an impression. Similarly, your academics might be your trousers and your shirt, but your extracurriculars play the role of your blazer and your tie.*”

With the dissolution of the Hobbies Club in the previous academic year, a Students’ Technical Council (organized along the lines of the Cultural Council and the Sports Council) emerged to cater to the demands of students involved in multiple technical clubs and groups. The Gymkhana fees, apart from the needs of the cultural, sports, and technical councils, also fulfils the requirements of various other campus activities that are pivotal to students’ everyday lives. For the very first



time, a well-structured breakdown of the Gymkhana fees was released publicly last year by the former Convenor of SAC, Mr. Apurwa Sarwajit. While there have been some changes to the erstwhile allocation, the breakdown, in our estimation is still immensely convoluted and volatile in nature.

## Bhawans

Bhawan Replacement & Purchase (BRP): ₹ 1700/- per student per year  
All Bachelors’ Bhawans: ₹ 400/- per student per year

*Note: A majority of our gymkhana fees (28%) goes to the DOSW for Bhawan Replacement & Purchase (BRP) Fund. In addition to the BRP fund, an amount of ₹ 400/- is also paid to the respective bhawans for promoting cultural activities, paying salaries to temporary employees, and taking care of all miscellaneous activities in the bhawans.*

A conversation with Mr. Aniket Jaiswal (the Cultural Secretary of Rajiv Bhawan) brought to the forefront the fact that a major chunk of the allocated fund is consistently spent on the salaries of the temporary staff, leaving little for bhawan activities. In addition to this, exorbitant expenses were incurred for Rajiv Bhawan’s last bhawan day, with food costing ₹650/- per plate (paid through the CCB account) and approximately ₹1,00,000 spent on decorations, tents, etc. Apart from bhawan inmates, only Deans, Institute

(Figures might not add up due to rounding off)

guests, and the student senators are invited to such days.

Upon being asked about the significance of bhawan days (which usually prove to be quite an expense to the institute) Ms. Pragya Choudhary (the current Technical Secretary of Kasturba Bhawan) said, “It is a way to make unresponsive people responsive, and imbibe a sense of belongingness in the bhawan inmates.” She further termed the usage of the bhawan funds as “confidential”.

When asked about the usage of the BRP fund, Mr. Sambhav Jain (GS: Hostel Affairs), responded, “The BRP funds are being used judiciously—but not uniformly—by the various bhawans, because the funds are controlled centrally and are allocated to a particular bhawan only on the request of the concerned council. This, in a sense, means that if a bhawan council is

sufficiently proactive, they can access a huge portion of the funds and use it as per the bhawan’s needs.”

On the condition of anonymity, one of the current senators clearly vouched for the need of an alternate channel for the distribution of BRP funds since the current mode (through the DOSW office) usually “causes delays”.

## Students' Activities

Misc. Students' Activities (DOSW):

**₹1200/- per student per year**

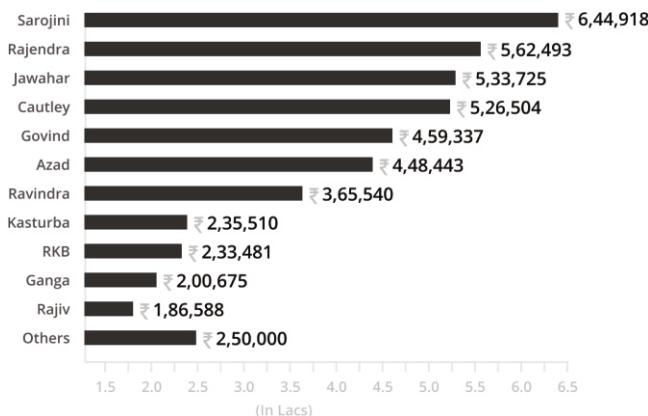
Students' Activities (ADOSW): ₹ 50/- per student per year

The funds act as buffer in cases where unanticipated disbursement has to be made. The activities falling under this section remain very motley and unpredictable. For instance, the fee for Your-Dost (the online counselling and emotional wellness platform) was paid from these funds. Also, in case a student seeks monetary help from college, if deemed worthy, these funds are used. If RFID-enabled cards, for example, are ever issued to the students, they shall be paid for through this channel.

## Sports Council

Sports Council: ₹ 850/- per student per year

While IITR boasts of one of the best sports facilities in the country, that there



**₹46,47,214**

Total BRP Funds Utilized Till Date

**₹60,36,700**

Total BRP Funds (per semester)

is a ‘preference’ for the NSO-registered students and those selected for Institute teams is the complaint of a majority of the students. To counter this, Mr. Shubham Vij (GS: Sports Affairs) has promised the establishment of ‘beginners’ camps’ for every student, as each student pays the sports fee. He also urges students to participate in the intra-bhawan and inter-bhawan sports competitions and contribute to developing a healthy sporting culture at IITR. However, for students who want to try their hands at a new sport, lack of adequate equipment and support infrastructure still remain a major concern.

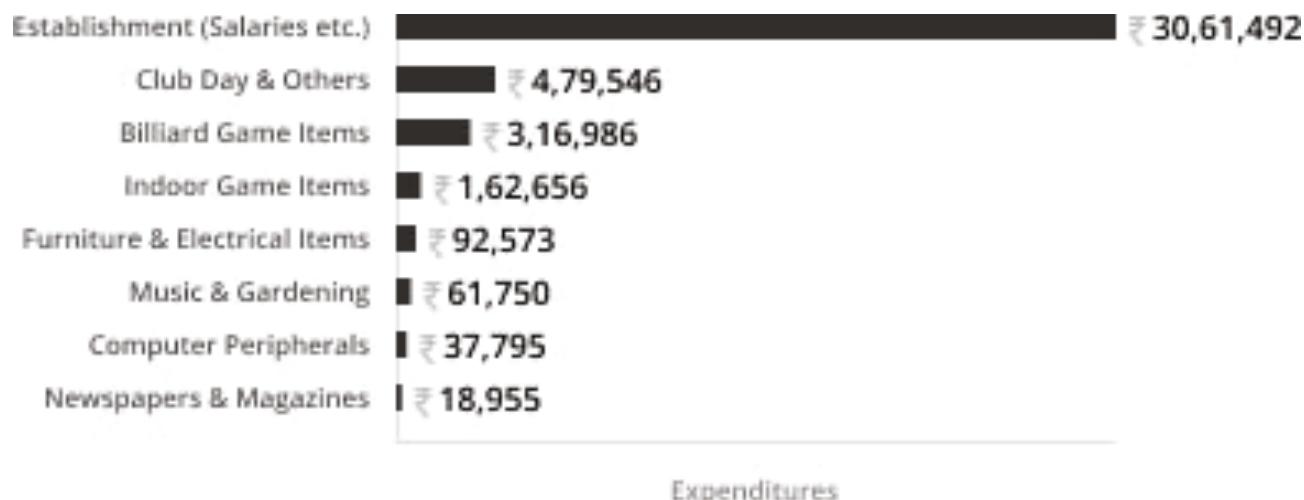
*Note: The breakdown varies with time and from sport to sport; therefore, we were unable to get a more detailed deconstruction of the funds. This will be covered in greater detail in a Watch Out article in the works, which will assess the intricacies of the sports culture at IITR.*

## Students’ Club

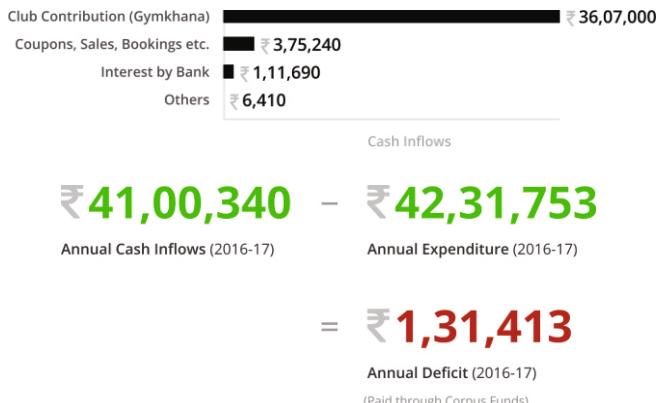
### **Students’ Club: ₹ 450/- per student per year**

The Students’ Club accounts for 7.5% of the gymkhana fees. This is used in its entirety for the functioning and maintenance of the three units of the Students’ Club, namely, the Main Unit, the Alaknanda Unit and the Jawahar Unit, (which is soon to be transferred under Jawahar Bhawan Council’s jurisdiction as per Mr. Arpit Agrawal, the current Technical Secretary of Jawahar Bhawan). It has ample infrastructure in all its units, with the maximum obviously being in the Main Unit.

The Students’ Club has a total of 5 permanent employees, 6 temporary employees, and 1 part-time accountant. The permanent employees, of which 2 will be retiring soon, have “pretty high salaries”, as stated by Mr. Suyash Vishnoi (Secretary, Students’ Club). The data obtained from the Annual Account Statement seems to support his claims, revealing that nearly 72% of the allocated funds go into paying



salaries to the employees. Even after said



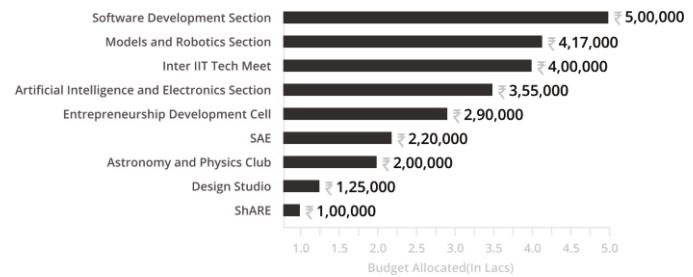
retirement of personnel, this will remain the single largest guzzler of Students' Club's funds.

The second largest chunk of the expenditure is on billiard games, comprising maintenance of the pool and snooker tables, and all other related equipment. It accounts for a mere 7.5%; however, in monetary terms, this translates to Rs. 3,17,000. At the same time, these games contribute to the income of the Students' Club through the 'coupons and bookings' which bring in about Rs. 3,75,000, and hence, they comfortably compensate for their expenditures.

The previous year was the first time that the Students' Club ran in deficit. Therefore, corpus funds from the last ten years were used to compensate for the same. This put pressure on these coffers and in the words of the Secretary, "they will soon be exhausted". Mr. Vishnoi adds that the Club has been advised by the SAC to exhaust these before an increase in the share of Students' Club in the Gymkhana

fees can be considered. Additionally, there has been a consistent decrease in the said share from Rs. 550 to Rs. 500, and finally to Rs. 450 in the past 3 years. With the Chess team now regularly representing (and bringing in laurels) in various competitions like the Inter-IIT Sports Meet, we believe that the reconsideration of this fund is imminent.

The Students' Club has been proactive in increasing the usage of its paraphernalia by the student community. It has organised snooker workshops to increase participation by non-players as well as hired a chess coach to help the teams with their Inter-IIT sports meet preparations. The club also spends approximately Rs.



**₹28,40,800** - **₹26,07,000**

Annual STC Budget      Total Funds Allocated (to Groups/Sections)

= **₹2,33,800**

Buffer

4,50,000 on the Annual Club Day and other activities, including the tournaments it holds round the year.

## Students' Technical Council

Students' Technical Council: ₹400/- per

## student per year

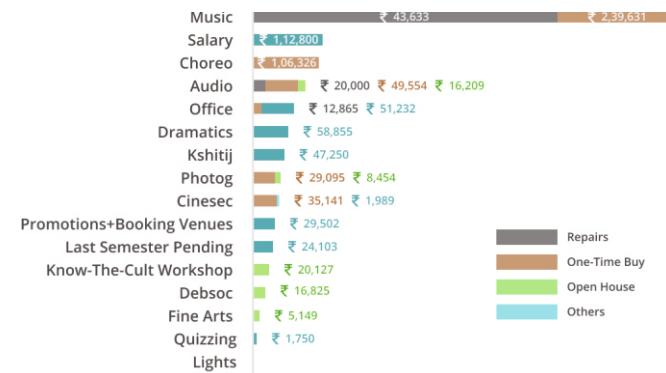
*"STC currently gets Rs. 400 per student of the total gymkhana fees. In the past years, the Council has had a splendid record, winning national and international competitions, and organizing workshops/lectures which have been a great source of technical knowledge in the campus. Given the promising potential of the Council, there is still scope for more efficient usage of increased funds, if provided. Also, in an effort to make groups more open, and for students to be able to bear the fruits of their gymkhana fees, the STC [had] launched an initiative that [sic] all STC groups will be listing all the resources/equipment purchased by them through STC Funds publicly. Any student can issue that resource/equipment just by writing an application to the respective group's secretary [sic]. If available, that resource or equipment can be issued to her/him."*

-Mr. Punit Dhoot, (GS: Technical Affairs)

While Tinkering Lab and TIDES do not receive finances from the Gymkhana fees, SAE—in addition to the funds allocated from the gymkhana fees—receives monetary help from the Director's Endowment Funds. The funds (shown in the graph above) were allocated at the request of the respective groups based on their judgements and needs. The breakdown, clearly, does not represent the institute's or SAC's perspective on the requirement of council groups.

## Cultural Council

Cultural Council: ₹ 350/- per student per year



₹ 24,85,700 – ₹ 17,80,490

Annual Cult Council Budget

Total Expenditure Till Date

= ₹ 7,05,210

Remaining Funds

(Note: Inter-IIT funds (₹ 8,50,000) have been removed from the complete budget to get a better visualisation of the graph.

The debate of making groups under the Cultural Council open to the entire campus populace has gained much momentum since its initiation; and has been able to garner the SAC's attention as well. This is meant to make the resources purchased by the Cultural Council available to every campus resident.

This year, the SAC took multiple initiatives to increase the participation of the student community in cultural activities.

All the groups came together to recruit again in the spring semester to provide another chance to students who might have missed it. The participation for the Inter-IIT Cultural Meet, too, was made open and transparent, and not limited to the respective groups.

Despite all the steps taken, the analysis made by Watch Out clearly shows that the money spent on open house activities remains a mere fraction (< 4%) of the total expenditure till date. Also, with over 30% of the fund being outlaid through disbursements for the Inter-IIT Cultural Meet, little is left for professional workshops and in-house events, says Mr. Prajwal Bhatt, (GS: Cultural Affairs). He added that in the autumn semester, a large share of the funds spent were spent on repairs and purchases as a lot of the requirements of the Music Section (in terms of instruments and others) had been pending for quite some time and were promptly approved in the previous semester. All leftover funds, for the spring semester, will be used on 50-50 basis for purchases/repairs and open house events.

*“Budget is not really the constraint behind organising workshops for helping people perform better in FoS; building a personal bond is something which is extremely important. Like, people who performed in FoS brought gifts for the people in choreo section who helped them. That was a beautiful gesture, and moreover, building a personal bond helps pull off a better performance.”*

*—Mr. Siddhant Bharadwaj, Dramatics*

## Society

Traditionally, the clubs/groups tend to spend a disproportionately large amount on in-house events but are reluctant to spend on open house events, such as the FoS, and this has continued into the current academic year. However, opening up of the sections' resources to the campus *junta* was a bold move. Now, any student can use any resource of the Cultural Council by following the official channel and writing an application to the Faculty Advisor.

*“Music Section organised JAM-DAY a couple of weeks ago to see how many people actually show up; participation was approximately null. The issue being [that] on providing help and support, not everyone comes forward. When it comes to making instruments available to 8000 students, it's a matter of concern when a student is a newbie. For example, repairing of a synthesizer key costs ₹3,000 approximately, so, at least some prior knowledge is extremely necessary. Maybe, the classes arranged by SAC will be useful. Also, IIT Bombay has got its own music room in every hostel—this is a great initiative which the bhawan councils should look forward to implementing.”*

*—Mr. Rutuj Bhayani, Ad. Secretary, Music Section*

The efforts of the current council should not go unrecognised as it has taken a number of initiatives to promote the “cult” in the campus, including initiation of music and dance classes. Due to

significant participation, it seems that there is a requirement of additional instructors with the monthly salary of each being Rs. 15,000 and Rs. 20,000 respectively. The groups have opened recruitments in both the semesters and resources have been made available to the masses. The open selections for the Inter-IIT Cultural Meet, we believe, was another bold move that was appreciated by the IITR community.

## **SAC**

### **SAC: ₹90/- per student per year**

The SAC fund is meant to pay for the celebrations of various festivals (Diwali, Holi, to name a few), as well as other activities under its prerogative—such as the organisation of the Freshers' Week (and ensuing activities)—and the organisation of certain lectures by the SAC. Any added cost such as the publicity of the aforementioned activities through posters and flex printing is also included in this. Miscellaneous expenses under this comprise setting up water pots for the dogs in the campus to, in a way, avert them from drinking from water coolers meant for students. In simpler terms, it is upto the SAC to judiciously use the allocated funds as per their discretion.

## **Students' Wellness**

### **Students' Wellness: ₹80/- per student per year**

To ensure that the stay at IITR be a pleasant one, a specific office for issues related to the 'wellness' of students was established at the end of the last academic year. This, in essence, was a huge step taken to address issues of mental health at an institute like ours. SMP, SSP, and the Counselling Cell fall under the jurisdiction of this office, the one of ADOSW: Students' Wellness. The office also takes care of the orientation ceremony of the incoming batch every year; and a separate budget for the ceremony is to be approved by an "adequate" authority. With the establishment of this new office, we certainly expect some bold renovation and refinement of the existing system.

## **Others**

### **Cinema Club: ₹150/- per student per year**

**HEC: ₹150/- per student per year**

**SPIC MACAY: ₹100/- per student per year**

**NSS: ₹30/- per student per year**

Individual initiatives like these take up the leftover fraction of the gymkhana fund for their own activities. Cinema Club, for example, uses its fund to showcase movies in the convocation hall for the students, while SPIC MACAY uses the money to organise events like Virasat to promote the classical performing arts. Mr. Adarsh Goyal, a member of SPIC MACAY, says that these funds help them invite high-calibre artists, like Padma Shri and Grammy laureates, for periodic

events and workshops. He adds, “*Most of our money goes in the arrangement of these events, like the stage setup and publicity through flexes and posters. We also incur the travel costs for the artistes, along with some other hospitality-related expenditures, which are paid for through our funds.*”

Speaking for the Himalayan Explorers’ Club, Mr. Manish Gupta, the secretary, says, “*HEC organises close to 30 short and long treks throughout the year with an average participation of 40 students. Registration of these treks is open-to-all, and a subsidy of around 500/- is given to each of the participants. Some expeditions are more extensive than the others, the recent one to Kalindikhal (at a height of 6000 metres) being an example, and take up more funds than the others. HEC also organises two skating camps in a year, along with a cycle-race, CAT (Confidence Assault Training) course, certain guest lectures and an annual Plantation Day. Winners of the cycle-race, the CAT course and for different adventurous categories are awarded during the Annual Club Day of the group. Funds are also used in buying and repairing the trekking equipments like tents, sleeping bags, mats, torches, cooking equipments, and skates. Other expenditures include refreshments for on-campus events, hospitality costs for the guests, and the printing costs of an annual magazine of the group. HEC also has three salaried-employees to look after the funds, the park, and the store of the club, and they are also being paid from the same funds.*” He also cited the need for

additional money, mentioning that HEC has taken a social initiative under rural development cell of ‘Mountain Cleaning Drive’, and it is looking for more funds to make this initiative successful.

As far as NSS is concerned, Mr. Tejas Khadilkar, the current Secretary, mentions that most of their budget goes into the organisation of events like National Social Summit and Blood Donation Camps. In addition to these, he says that initiatives like cloth distribution drives, cleanliness drives, teaching classes, and various guest lectures take up a major chunk of their budget. He further adds, “*The constraint of budget keeps us from inviting high profile guests as we are barely able to fund their correspondingly high travel and hospitality expenses.*”

## Our Two Cents

The gymkhana funds shape the direction in which our institute performs in the extracurricular vertical, and is a central piece in determining the overall character development and the completeness that the students graduating from here possess. With a few much-needed changes to the allocation of these funds, the gymkhana funds can adequately and appropriately address the needs of the upcoming batches of students. After careful consideration and elaborate conversations with a lot of people involved in the process, we’d humbly like to suggest the following improvements to the allocation.

First things first: we are all living in an era where justifying a virtual platform would be nothing but naive, and the Institute Gymkhana should definitely have a website of its own where information regarding all important activities should be updated. To ensure accountability and credibility a more ‘user friendly’ annual report should be published by the SAC every academic year.

Using the extracurricular fee to promote new technological advancements and a thriving culture of performing arts and fine arts should be the foremost priority of the institute. The current breakdown, however, does not reflect this notion. With 35% of the gymkhana fees being contributed to the repairs, purchases and operational activities of bhawan, aspiring for major reforms seems justified. Though a provision of making use of the cultural sections' resources is put into effect, the process seems latent because of the protocol involved. Also, with only handful students being the members of the performing sections, a large fraction of students who are willing to get involved in cultural activities are neglected; to cater to their aspirations and interests, facilities shall (and need to) be setup in individual bhawans under the jurisdiction of the Cultural Secretary of that bhawan (Cautley Bhawan, for example, has set up their own Music Room recently).

Another major issue was that 35% of the Cultural Council Budget and 14% of the

Technical Council Budget went into reimbursements of respective Inter IIT Meets. While expenditures of this nature are extremely necessary, whether these be done at the expense of the gymkhana funds allocated to these societies is a question worth considering. The Inter IIT Sports Meet, in contrast, is funded by the MHRD completely. While it is still early days to expect the same for the former two, steps in this direction shall certainly free up funds for promotion of better facilities in-house for these councils.

As a closing note, we also firmly believe that hiring an expert who could analyse the needs of the various sections and societies in the campus would help us allocate the extracurricular fees more effectively. Unarguably, this breakdown is extremely important to the student community, and a judicious use of this amount shall certainly help our cause.

#### *Disclaimer:*

*Watch Out gathered all the data and statements after meeting the respective secretaries of various bhawans or the councils involved. In case of any discrepancies, please reach out to us so that we can rectify the same.*

# WHY ARE YOU?

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*“Man is the only creature that refuses to be what he is.”*  
- Albert Camus

The predominant intention behind writing this editorial was its being read; to gain appreciation from as many people as possible. Because that is what defines the “success” of an article.

Success: A rather familiar concept, isn’t it?

But consider this: The average human being is a 1.75 m tall living organism with an expected life span of about 80 years, probably sitting on a chair somewhere on a planet that is over 4.6 billion years old and has a radius of approximately 6371 km in a “solar system”. This solar system is organized around the “sun” – an entity 1.3 million times larger than our planet – which is basically just an average sized star among more than a 100 billion stars in a galaxy that’s just one among 2 trillion galaxies in the observable universe.

Just the observable universe.

In the (literally) larger picture, anyone – including you, dear reader – is just like a speck of dust that crosses one’s path in life for but a fraction of a second and doesn’t alter anything.

“How does this even matter?” you may ask.

It is here on earth that there is life. All life is tiny. All life is short-lived. Should being able to make a difference in the cosmic scheme of things really be our concern? Should we not aspire to create a more immediate, localized difference, which is far more plausible?

Thousands of species have walked our planet through time; they have come and gone, in a manner similar to the passing of each day. We scarcely remember the people responsible for the progress of our civilization; fire is an indispensable phenomenon that sustains our civilization – electricity, a majority of chemical processes and vehicles, all involve the use of fire. But do we really care enough to enquire who discovered it?

After – or perhaps even before – the human race is wiped out, no one will know about what you did, or how exceptionally talented you were. The chronicle of your life – however magnificent – will be lost in the sands of time.

A billion years from now, the Earth may stay where it is, governed by another species, circling the sun in a galaxy among a

lot of galaxies, and no one would care about how many Jews Hitler had killed.

*Change is permanent, they say; transience, the unwritten law of the universe.* Why then, should we bother at all? Why should we even care to make a difference sitting on this tiny little rock in the universe? What does success come to mean, given that we know the entire logistics of how the world works may change a few hundred thousand years down the line?

There are a lot of erroneous assumptions underlying these quiet musings, primarily that the question of life can be condensed and objectified into a given combination of words: It cannot be.

What if one doesn't mind the transience at all? What if they simply want to live in the now? And what if they don't?

The answers to this eternal question of life can be many. They can all be correct and they can all be wrong. The relevance of the answers – and of the question itself – depends solely on your perspective. There can be as many perspectives as there have been humans; perhaps more.

Figuring out yours is a battle that you have to fight alone.



# WHITHER DO WE GO?

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In the dystopian world of George Orwell's classic 1984, the readers are introduced to a fictitious language christened 'New-speak', an ingenious mechanism to curb the proliferation of rebellious thought by meticulously eliminating the essence of language: words; words that could potentially serve as petri dishes to culture and transmit or communicate mutinous thoughts.

If thought about for a bit longer than usual, the effects of imposing such a curb on words are far-reaching and enormous; a world without words like "love" and "joy" would be incredibly sullen and morbid. Like the drowning man - hastily beating about, looking for a straw to clutch at - humans would flutter in vain. This gives birth to a bigger, more disturbing question: would people even be able to perceive a particular feeling as *jubilation* or *grief*?

Similarly, the people of Oceania couldn't feel *mutinous*, thus illustrating that limited resources lead to limited scope of thought. Aren't we being exceedingly ambitious, then, when we attempt to comprehend the biggest infinities of all – the universe - with our limited scope of rational thought?

In his short work on melancholia and philosophy - A Confession - Tolstoy comes to the very same conclusion. Stricken by a deep existential crisis, he sought to answer the same question that this editorial poses: what do we do once we've discovered that there is no profound meaning to life? Why should we continue to live? He found that people within his social circle dealt with this in one out of these four ways :

- 1) Choosing not to think about the question (ignorance)
- 2) Choosing to enjoy the small things in life whilst acknowledging the absurdity of it all (epicureanism)
- 3) Choosing to kill oneself ("strength")
- 4) Choosing to labour on, petrified by the thought of death ("weakness").

After pacing up and down for a while (in a figurative sense), he realizes that he had unwittingly excluded another category of people: the ones who had faith. Despite being a staunch advocate of rational thought, Tolstoy realizes its confining nature.

The question we have been dealing with is : what is the purpose of our finite existence in this ever expanding, infinite universe? Therein lies our mistake, Tolstoy says.

To answer a question that deals with the infinite, one must have an answer armed with reasoning that encompasses the infinite. Rational thought is largely limited by factors like starvation and death; they are characteristics of the finite, mortal world we live in. Tolstoy admits that while faith is irrational, the answers it gives always possess the ability to connect the finite with the infinite - which is the essence of what we are looking for. No one captures this better than Tolstoy : *"For man to be able to live he must either not see the infinite, or have such an explanation of the meaning of life as will connect the finite with the infinite."*

The pioneer of Absurdism, Albert Camus, was Epicurean at heart. In his masterpiece, The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus discusses at length the underlying concepts of absurdism. Like Tolstoy, he acknowledges the insignificance of human life in the grander scheme of things, but unlike Tolstoy, doesn't find solace in faith. He calls the act of giving into faith (i.e. ceasing to be skeptical) "philosophical suicide". However, he does not disregard human life completely and submit to Nihilism; Camus presents us with a third option rooted in reality, which is largely Epicurean at heart. To illustrate his outlook on life, he mentions the mythological story of Sisyphus.

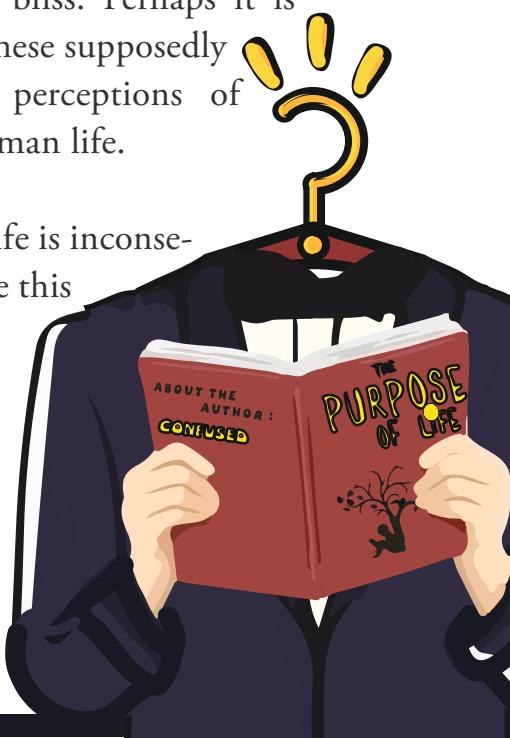
Sisyphus was a king cursed by the Gods to roll a boulder on to the top of a moun-

tain, only to watch it roll down again - in perpetuity. Camus draws a parallel between our finite, inconsequential existence and Sisyphus' curse and asks us to "think of Sisyphus as happy". Camus writes *"If there is a sin against this life, it consists perhaps not so much into sparing of life, as in hoping for another life and eluding the quiet grandeurs of this one"*.

Camus, as is clear, was an emphatic advocate of living in the moment and enjoying the everyday pleasures of life. It is these pleasures that Camus cites as reasons for enduring life.

Over the years, countless philosophers have put forth innumerable theories trying to answer the same question that this editorial has been dealing with. It seems logical, then, to believe in the subjectivity of the meaning of life. A preordained meaning will perhaps never be found, but all of us may (or may not) have our own reasons for enduring life. Perhaps ignorance truly is bliss. Perhaps it is best to believe in these supposedly "inconsequential" perceptions of the meaning of human life.

Or - perhaps - all life is inconsequential, much like this editorial.





It's no secret that an institute's alumni are the key to its growth. They represent the guiding philosophies and mindset with which the institute's founders intended their protegees to flourish. They raise the bar of the achievement with their extraordinary accomplishments, and with it the prestige of the institute. An institute's alumni also help shape the current students of an institute, nurturing

## COVER STORY

### THE ALUMNI EFFECT

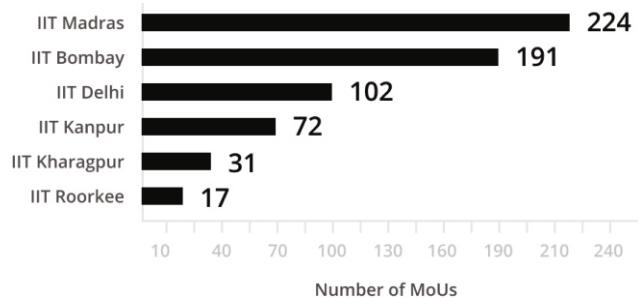
juniors towards even bigger dreams, and guiding them to reach greater heights. This is done via career counselling sessions, or via funds that they donate to the institute for the setting up of new labs and facilities.

The current state of alumni relations at IIT Roorkee shows great scope for improvement. A few of the issues that we will deliberate on in the following paragraphs are the limited transparency in the usage of the donations that various alumni have donated to our institute, and the arduous process one has to go through in order to connect with an alumnus. We will also cover recent developments, like the initiation of the student alumni mentorship program (SAMP) and the creation of an online portal, geared towards solving these problems.

## MoUs

Universities and educational institutions sign Memorandums of Understanding (or MoUs) with other universities in order to facilitate the exchange of students, ensure mutual curriculum development, as well as provide research grants. Having MoUs with reputed universities around the globe exposes students to a plethora of exclusive opportunities. In terms of quality and quantity of formalised MoUs, however, IIT Roorkee lags behind many other IITs.

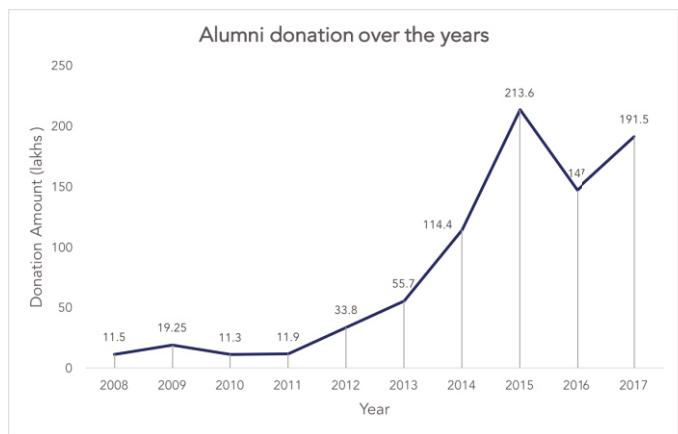
Most of IIT Roorkee's MoUs are relatively new, since it has recently become a priori-



ty to foster university connects using alumni relations. The official procedure of establishing an MoU involves the presence of at least two nodal officers, one from each university. Any professor, dean, or even the director can act as a nodal officer. While it is easier to identify a nodal officer here, it is much more difficult to contact a professor who would be interested in being a nodal officer at the institute with which the MoU is to be signed. To overcome this problem, the Institute Alumni Relations Cell (IARC) is assimilating information from students who have gone for foreign internships under a professor as well as contacting Roorkee alumni currently studying in foreign universities. This will enable the DoRA office to establish contact with university professors who would be familiar with IITR and willing to become a nodal officer for that university. In this manner, IARC aims to become the missing channel between students and the administration.

Our current administration recognises these issues and is continuously working to improve IITR's international image. According to the Dean of Resources and Alumni Affairs, Dr. B.R. Gurjar, IIT

Roorkee has many informal MoUs with international universities with an active exchange of students taking place, but



these are not formalised yet. The documentation of these MoUs is under process.

## Alumni Donations

Hitherto, there was an incomplete transparency in the usage and channelising of funds that were being donated by the alumni, due to improper documentation. In the view of dealing with this, initiatives such as an online payment gateway and crowdfunding platforms are under progress. Once the donations are made online, displaying the amount of money, mode of donations and utilization of the donated funds would be plain sailing. There also are plans to set up a committee in order to monitor the donations, and to ensure proper utilization. These initiatives also have the potential of resolving the difficulties faced by campus groups such as MARS/Robocon, etc., in obtaining these donations to represent IITR at com-

petitions held worldwide. It seems that IITR is witnessing burgeoning donations this year, including, Rs. 1.1 crore donated by the 1982 pass out batch in their recent silver jubilee meet. *"Within the last six months, one huge individual donation came from an alumnus who donated USD 92,000. He would also be donating USD 8,000 this January. So, a sum total of USD 100,000 will have been donated by him alone,"* quoted the Dean of Resources and Alumni Affairs.

## External Alumni Bodies and Chapters

IITR has many active national as well as international alumni chapters. However, these chapters have limited contact among themselves, and are usually unaware of the activities of other chapters. They make donations to the institution, but do not have much knowledge about the happenings back at their alma mater. IARC, being a fairly recent student initiative, suffers from a different problem: the fact that it does not have sufficient data of the older alumni. On the other hand, IARC's alumni counterpart, the IIT Roorkee Alumni Association, is an established body that includes many older alumni as its members, but have little or no active student involvement. The IIT Roorkee Alumni Association, in collaboration with the Dean of Resources and Alumni Affairs (DoRA), organises commemorative jubilee meets of batches and chapters. Apart from these bodies, an umbrella organisation called the Students'



Alumni chapters across the globe

Pan-IIT Alumni Relations Cell (SPARC) exists to keep track of the initiatives and accomplishments of the alumni relations bodies in different IITs. This body has a limited role, and it organises an annual meet for alumni as well as student representatives of the IITs. SPARC includes representatives from IIT Madras, Bombay, Kharagpur, and Guwahati, with IIT Roorkee and IIT BHU joining the cell in 2017.

### IARC's Structure



Dean

GS Alum

Secretary IARC

Joint Secy

Joint Secy

Joint Secy

IARC, a student body under the Dean Of Resources and Alumni Affairs, has around thirty student members, with Manik Verma, (General Secretary, Alumni Affairs) as its student representative. The body is headed by its Secretary, Arpit Mishra. However, the role of both these positions seems consubstantial without any substratal difference. Owing to an inchoate IARC, the post of student secretary had to be appended to preside over the group activities alongside alumni activities and administration. Eventually, as IARC becomes entrenched, the post of GS Alumni Affairs would become superfluous. Manik, when asked for, regarding the same, remarked, *"In future it (the existence of both posts) is redundant. Only a person who has worked in IARC and who shares such a vision with all other members should lead IARC. GS Alumni Affairs serves as a point of contact for Alumni and the institute and therefore a new person can't*

*come and simply take over.” “However, in case the GS Alumni Affairs does not get removed, then whosoever gets nominated for GS Alumni Affairs should be a member of IARC or should have worked in coordination with IARC so as to have some prior experience,”* added Arpit.

## Our Two Cents

IIT Roorkee has an honorable heritage, spanning almost 200 years, and we have come a long way since our establishment. Ranging from the times of Shri Ganga Ram, the founder of modern Lahore, to the more recent Amit Singhal, Jaiprakash Gaur, and Sanjiv Singh, our alumni have played a very important role in shaping our reputation. Having a strong alumni network does not only lead to the development of an institute in terms of donations and grants, but it also leads to the advancement of the students studying there. IIT Roorkee alumni are everywhere- managing senior roles of multinational companies, building successful startups, and even occupying the most exclusive positions in the Indian Government. However, we have done very little to maintain strong bonds with our alumni.

We have, however, realised how a strong and a positive relationship with alumni can benefit us socially, academically and professionally. Now, a cooperative administration, along with a hard-working student body are actively reaching out to alumni, contacting them for support as

well as helping them with all their campus-related issues. Despite a few organisational flaws, failures, and setbacks, the overall impact is positive. We are seeing an unprecedented growth in alumni involvement. In the words of Dr. B.R. Gurjar, *“Our condition is improving by leaps and bounds, and in the time to come, we will have more alumni involvement in campus activities, higher donations, and most importantly, better networking among all the IIT-R alumni in the world.”*

## In conversation with Dr. B.R. Gurjar

*Dr. Gurjar, Dean of Resources and Alumni Affairs, took out some time to talk to us about the state of alumni relations at our institute. Here is an excerpt of our interview with Dr. Gurjar on 6th of January, 2018.*

**Watch Out:** Why is the number of MoUs that IIT Roorkee has much less in comparison to the other IITs?

**DoRA:** There are many informal MoUs which aren't signed yet. They are collaborations of the faculty members for supervision of PhD students, thesis studies, exchange of faculty and students. The only problem is that they haven't been documented yet like the other IITs have. The documentation is still in process, and it is being done with the help of IARC members and the other staff members hired for the same. So, collaborations of IITR are no less than the other IITs. There

is just a lack of proper documentation.

**Watch Out:** Do you think there is a lack of transparency in alumni donations? Why is it difficult to get donations from the alumni?

**DoRA:** The Online donation portal wasn't present earlier but now it has been established. The alumni connections exist and they are coming forward to donate more and more. We are now accelerating the donation process, so more donations are coming up. Another issue is that the older Roorkee alumni are usually doing administrative jobs in the public or the private sectors and are not well-established industrialists. However, the recent graduates are more into entrepreneurship. So when they are financially strong themselves, only then they can afford to donate. Organisations like the IIT Roorkee Heritage foundation, situated in the USA, help us receive donations from international donors.

**Watch Out:** What are the connections we have established with the different alumni chapters? Also, what responsibilities and activities does the alumni association have that differentiates it from the IARC?

**DoRA:** Basically, the IARC is not that well established as of now and they are trying to connect with the recent alumni, whereas, the IITR Alumni Association is very old and hence has a larger database of the older alumni. They keep on organizing various activities and jubilee meets for our older alumni.

**Watch Out:** What are your views on the apparent redundancy of two separate posts, i.e. GS Alumni Affairs, and the head of the IARC? Aren't their functions the same?

**DoRA:** It is better if a member of the group itself takes the post of secretary. Having a nominated, competent final-year member of the IARC handling all the responsibilities of alumni relations will be much more conducive than having someone from open elections, since alumni connections is a specialized activity that needs years of experience. Doing justice to these responsibilities is not everyone's cup of tea.

# ON MORALITY



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*"Give a man a mask and he'll be his true self"*  
- V, V for Vendetta

Can a man's conscience be fundamentally - and considerably - altered by providing him with a veil of anonymity? It is unnerving to think that most people only behave morally because they fear society's judgement; people would not take kindly to the idea that their most cherished beliefs and values are not chosen, but are products of their environment.

The all-pervading issue of alcohol consumption amongst college students is an example that adequately illustrates the

erratic nature of the human moral compass. A child brought up in a household that shuns drinking is bound to associate negative sentiments with the consumption of alcohol, while a child brought up in a comparatively lenient household will find the occasional indulgence perfectly reasonable. Proffered alcohol might be turned down by both; but their reasons will be very different: fear plays a major role in the former, while choice is the decisive factor in the latter; the moral compasses they fall back on when offered

a drink are markedly different.

One is then driven to believe that humans do not choose their moral compass, neither is it preordained. Moral values are shaped over time in such a manner that one fits into their immediate society like the metaphorical hand into the glove. The malleable nature of our morality means that societal norms mould our moral compass. Our sense of morality is far more inconsistent than we would like to believe.

It is romantic to believe that human beings have something inherent that makes up their moral compass and determines their rationality; this provides us with a sense of moral resolve in our character, and safeguards us against the possibility of descending into a state of chaos and lawlessness (when the shackles of societal judgement are eliminated).

But this is far from the truth.

As we saw with the case of alcohol consumption, an individual's sense of right and wrong is largely determined by societal norms. In societies, certain behavioural aspects are appreciated - and hence, rewarded - whereas others are frowned upon, and punished. A person consciously or unconsciously imbibes these norms and aligns his moral compass with them. These social norms are further reinforced by the laws we have. It is unacceptable to

kill, steal and cheat, and so we have laws against them; we are discouraged against these rather subtly. It is not our inherent morality that stops us from doing certain things but rather the fear of the law and of social ridicule.

Morals and laws have a symbiotic relationship; the laws of today are derived from a vague set of gradually evolving social mores in human society. These laws, in turn, reinforce the social mores that set them up in the first place, and bring about what we call "morality". Contrary to popular belief, laws and existing societal norms - and not intrinsic moral values - predominantly shape the code of ethics that society follows. While one may argue that the presence of inherent morality and human values give rise to modern law, if there truly was an inherent morality, the consequent laws would have been uniform across all societies.

This raises an unsettling question: what would happen in a lawless society? A few contemporary incidents have set interesting precedents for the same.

Marina Abramovic is a Serbian performance artist. In a famous 1972 experiment, she stood still in a public gallery with instructions written on a notice board behind her, stating that she would stand still for 6 hours and that anyone could use 72 objects placed in front of her on her in any way they desired and that

any and all responsibility would be hers. Initially she only attracted photographers but people slowly started behaving in ways that would (generally) be socially unacceptable. It started with people pushing her and trying to embarrass her, but soon escalated into people molesting her and engaging in acts of violence like cutting her neck and ripping her clothes off. She was even made to point a loaded gun at herself. None of the attackers attempted to make eye contact with her at the end of 6 hours; they wanted to distance themselves from the happenings of the last 6 hours.

*"This work reveals something terrible about humanity. It shows how fast a person can hurt you under favorable circumstances. It shows how easy it is to dehumanize a person who does not fight, who does not defend himself. It shows that if he provides the stage, the majority of 'normal' people, apparently can become truly violent."*

- Abromvic

Along similar lines is the concept behind the movie, The Purge. The notion of "a period of time where all criminal activity is legalised", is introduced in the film; it brings out the vile, lawless side of humans. The notion that humans would run around killing each other without rationale (during this period) might seem absurd, but that might be because - under normal circumstances - murder seems too far fetched, even unimaginable. Most of

us would most certainly indulge in thievery during such a lawless time. All of us might not turn into murderers instantly, but even the most principled among us are likely to indulge in crime when we see (ordinarily) law abiding citizens throwing bricks or burning down houses; a descent into anarchy will soon follow, for it takes only one rebel to lead the herd.

With absolutely no morality in sight, our adherence to moral values is bound to break down.

The Korowai from Western New Guinea is a tribe where the "sinful" practice of cannibalism is still persists. Much like a child brought up in an orthodox society will live in fear of ever consuming alcohol, a child brought up in a society where cannibalism has been practiced for centuries will - almost certainly - grow up to be a cannibal, devoid of any repulsion towards the consumption of human flesh.

This brings up another important question : will a man brought up in contemporary society turn into a cannibal if he's stranded on the very island in Fiji where cannibalism is practiced?

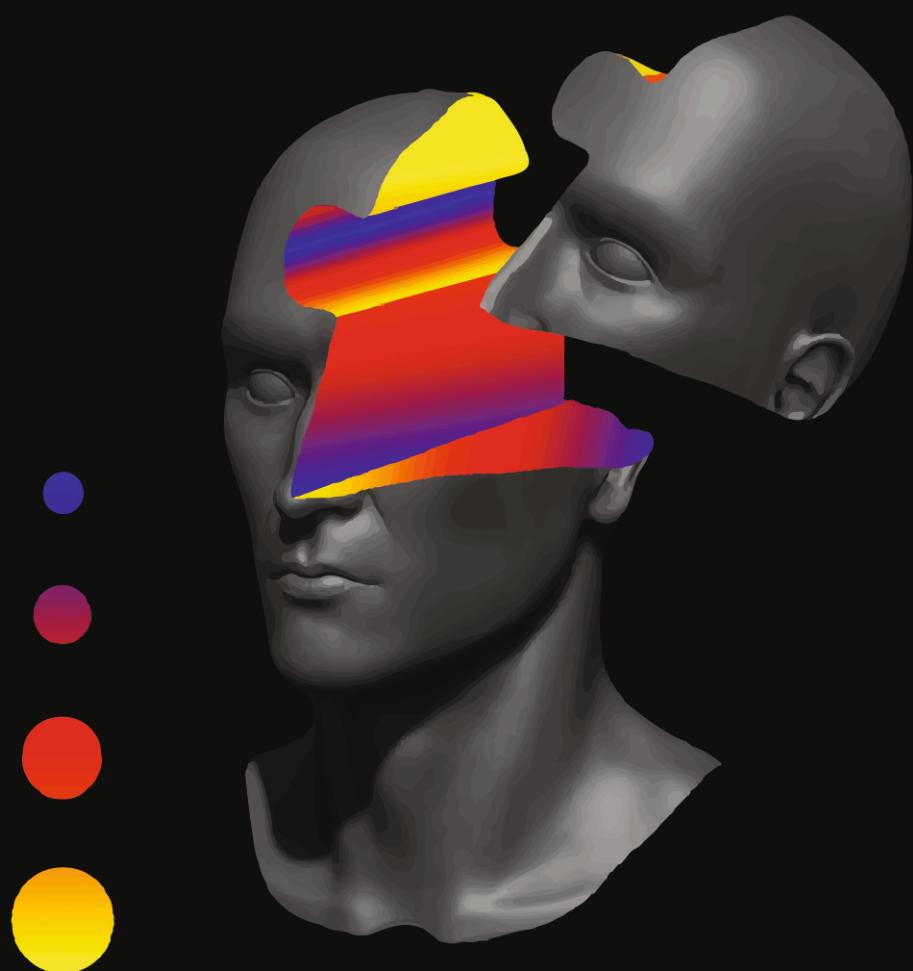
The answer to this question is not definite. Not only will this change depend on external factors (like the lack of other sources of nutrition, and the social response to his repulsion towards cannibalism), it will depend on something

much deeper: his/her moral rigidity.

Whether or not a person will resort to cannibalism, indulge in arson during The Purge or a student will consume alcohol will all depend on how deeply ingrained these fundamentals are in him/her. The extent of this aversion to “wrong and sinful things” will depend not only on how well society made use of the malleable nature of the moral compass, but also, more importantly, on the person himself.

But how deeply ingrained are these morals? Can some aspects of our morality never truly change?

It would seem, upon reflection, that the moral compass of every human being is subject to realignment. Continuing with the cannibalism example, consider this situation: a sailor stranded on a raft has no food for sustenance other than human flesh. Given enough time in such a predicament, all but the most high-minded among us are bound to break with our



principles; people remain morally conscious as long as it is convenient for them to do so.

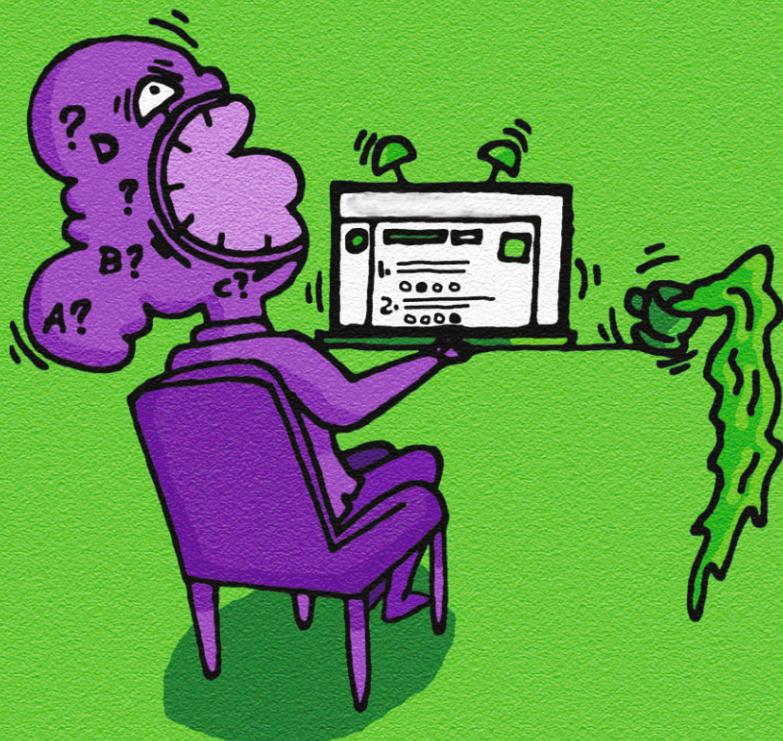
Our morality, then, is a spectrum that changes with circumstance and time. While we might agree that killing is a heinous crime, soldiers who kill people to protect their country are not vilified; neither are the people who commit crimes to protect their family or to help the poor. Gladiators offered spectators an example of Rome's rich martial tradition; in fighting and dying with glory, they could inspire admiration and garner popular acclaim. Morality tells us that killing is wrong, but in a different era, killing in gladiator fights was celebrated: our morality has changed with time, and the change has been far reaching and profound.

Most people consider themselves upstanding members of society on the

basis of certain moral principles that they consider inviolable. Those seen to be acting contrary to these morals - or adjudged to be lacking conscience - are commonly labelled psychopaths. However, is it not true that the "principled" majority will not hesitate to partake in the most heinous of crimes (once under the veil of anonymity and hence free from all law and the judgement)?

It has been established that morality is not objective, but that it changes with our social surroundings, situation and time. The rigidity with which one sticks to their morals varies from person to person, but everyone is prone to the breakdown of their moral compass in extreme situations. If there is no such thing as an intrinsic morality, and all that keeps us from robbing our neighbours or from rioting is the mere fabrication that is our society, aren't we all psychopaths?

# FEEDBACK FOR FEEDBACK FORMS



For the average student, the course feedback form is something that connotes rapid, indiscriminate clicking of arbitrarily chosen checkboxes, arising out of the impending deadline that looms over his/her head. It gives rise to some creative patterns of filling in the MCQs, reminiscent of an academically broke student randomly attempting a subject he doesn't know anything about. This casual attitude exhibited by a majority of the Roorkee populous is

indicative of the ineffectiveness of the feedback system, and how it doesn't have the required impact.

Given how the system isn't high on transparency and has a lot of uncertainties associated with it, we spoke to Professor B. K. Mishra, Dean of Faculty Affairs, to gain insight on how it functions and how its inadequacies can be rectified.

## The current picture

Before the existence of the college intranet, the feedback exercise was carried out by the professors in the class itself, at the end of the semester. Several years ago, the form moved online with a revised set of questions and categories. From the vantage point of a student, the feedback form consists of two parts: a course evaluation form and a professor/instructor evaluation form. The two sections contain a set of related statements with the student having to align with them, along various degrees, via selecting the appropriate response. An optional text box is provided for additional comments for the same. The format remains consistent across all courses and the respective professors. Submission of the form is mandatory as the subject registration portal becomes available only after its completion. While being an important mechanism for the professor to get the occasional, valuable feedback and ways in which he can improve, a cross sectional analysis of the system reveals several inadequacies and areas in which the process can improve in.

## Situation in other institutes

From the information we could gather, the tedious nature of the feedback form

is common in several other IITs. However, significant professor accountability is associated with the feedback. In IIT Delhi, the feedback form is very comprehensive and can take upto two hours to fill, for all courses. Some professors use a mid semester evaluation too. There have been cases in the past where a professor has been forced to drop a course as a result of negative feedback. This results in both the students and the professor taking the entire mechanism extremely seriously. In IIT Bombay too, the form is lengthy and time consuming.

## Where does the feedback go?

Due to the absence of any information regarding the fate of these forms, the hazy situation poses a lot of questions. Where does the data end up? Who scrutinizes it? Are our feedbacks incognito? The answer to the question “What impact does my feedback have?” is the paramount metric governing the attitude of a student during the process.

Once the form is filled in by the students, it is sent to the professor teaching the course. The forms and reviews are also accessible by the HoD and the

Dean of Academics, but the system is currently only intended as a means for the professor to assess themselves, which means that there is no carrot or stick involved in the process. Until last year, The Institute Best Teacher Award was given to the professor with the highest rating on these forms, but this practice has now been discontinued.

Suggestions such as making the form responses public or having a minimum rating requirement to teach courses are unlikely to be accepted.

***It is worth emphasising that the anonymity of the forms is maintained throughout; no authority can find out who has filled any particular form.***

After our conversation with Prof. Mishra, it was evident that without any ramifications of a positive or negative response of the process, the utility of the current structure is debatable. A concrete process to measure a professor's teaching performance in some quantifiable way is non-existent, preventing them for being held accountable for their teaching. Any instructor is not accountable for overwhelmingly negative responses in the absence of any negative ramifications put in place

by the administration. It is a common observance that many professors who are rated poorly year after year, continue teaching the course. This lack of incentivisation to improve performance annulls any significance of a student's submission and practically renders the feedback system obsolete.

However, another aspect that needs to be addressed is the fact that students who don't attend the classes are also compulsorily asked to fill the feedback forms. These responses, in all probability, do not hold the same merit as the ones which come from students who are fairly regular in their attendance, and might skew the results in an unfair manner.

### **Ambit of the questions is questionable**

The questionnaire itself has some inherent weaknesses and flaws, the most glaring of which is the complete omission of the evaluation of the practical labs and the lab instructors associated with a course. Practical aspects of a course are where a student exercises the knowledge they gain from it, and hence should be incorporated in the feedback mechanism. For example, in a course like Engineering Drawing,

which is a compulsory course for most students, a majority of the contact hours are spent in the Drawing Hall. These omissions result in the stagnation of the course components which go unevaluated by the students in the feedback form.

The courses a student undertakes vary a lot, from Communication Skills and department specific Introductory courses in the first year, to core departmental courses in later years. Yet the feedback form does not reflect this variation, instead barraging the student with the same questions for all courses. While it is necessary to keep some questions the same for the purpose of assessing different courses, and statistical analysis of all student responses; the current format induces a sense of monotony in a student who has to fill several such forms all at once.

### **Authenticity of data**

A major chunk of students delay the submission until the very last days of the deadline. In a majority of the cases, the response is a set of rapid clicks on a computer without any real thought on their part. This dwindles the credibility of their input and greatly decreases the overall validity of the data so collected.

The anonymity of responses grant the student free will to approach the form without the trepidation of any backlash. Although this sounds reasonable, in principle, a sizeable number of responders take advantage of it to vent frustrations which pollute the database. The unreliable responses somewhat invalidate the entire dataset and it is difficult to evaluate the course or the professor on the basis of these responses. In view of this, professors not taking these comments seriously is not surprising.

### **Our two cents**

While the feedback form is certainly facing some issues, it is an irreplaceable asset to both the student community as well as the professors. With a few improvements to the form and the procedure, we are optimistic about the results this improved procedure brings about.

We hereby suggest the following changes towards helping these forms actualize their potential :

### **Overhauling the form**

The first line of reform should be of the form itself. Omission of vague questions and admission of specific and clear ques-

tions would not only enhance the readability of the form, it would also be conducive to genuine responses. A collection of questions in different formats-some eliciting a score, some MCQ's and some demanding subjective responses can contribute to the same. Analysis of these forms can unearth revealing data about the cause of negative feedback(if any): an ineffective teaching mechanism or a flawed course structure.

While some common questions are required to grade the professor statistically, perhaps some personalised questions, specific to the course, need to be included. Not only will this elicit greater engagement from the student, it will also provide more effective feedback.

### **Statistically differentiating individual feedback**

In our discussion we came up with a way to validate the authenticity of the feedback from different students, based on their GPA or attendance in the particular course. Although the formula for the same might involve whimsical approaches, this method or other statistical models could be used to weed out the extreme responses, both positive and negative.

### **Introducing a mid-semester feedback**

Apart from an End-Term feedback, a post mid-term feedback should also be introduced. Slightly less comprehensive than the final questionnaire, it can contain suggestions and criticisms of the flow of the course without any impact on the final score an instructor gets. What this would do is provide wiggle room to the professor to make amends if required and get critical information about how their delivery is perceived. Students would also be able to see tangible impacts of their submissions during the span of the course, indicating that their responses did indeed carry weight. Consequential increase in the authenticity of their replies and decrease in the volume of retorts would follow.

### **Making some feedback for elective courses public**

While making course feedback public is not considered appropriate, the institute may find it more palatable to make elective course feedback public. "is will prove helpful to students in making the decision of picking a certain course.

## **Epilogue**

There shall be a committee meeting in the Main Building soon to discuss the future of the response form and the appropriate way to select the ‘Best Teacher’ award. However, from our talk with Prof. B. K. Mishra, we realised that the best suggestions could only come from the student populace. We encourage the reader to send us their suggestions to [watchout.iitr@gmail.com](mailto:watchout.iitr@gmail.com) so we could forward the same to the concerned authorities.

# IN CONVERSATION WITH DIRECTOR, IITR



*The following transcript has been adapted from the Watch Out's conversation with Prof. Chaturvedi, the Director of IIT Roorkee, during the Town Hall on 16th of March, 2018. Certain sections have been paraphrased to achieve better readability.*

**It has been just over a year since you joined the institute as its director, and there has been an apparent change in the dynamic since you took charge. What is has been your philosophy in**

**terms of leading an institute like IIT Roorkee?**

**Director:** It has been close to 15 months, and my journey till now has been quite satisfying. I feel fortunate to have received support from all sections of the institute, be it the student community or the faculty. I hope it continues the same way.

**Now, I must say, students at IIT Ro-**

**orkee have been pretty receptive to change, and are enthusiastic about new reforms and initiatives. Considering the fact that they are one of the major stakeholders in this institute, how does student participation & leadership fit into your plans?**

**Director:** We are currently facing the challenge of reaching out to the student community. Many things which the institute wants to share with the students isn't getting to them. The information flow needs improvement. A while back we instituted the Students' Aid Committee with the aim of easing things for the students facing financial problems, but surprisingly a sizeable number of students aren't aware of the same. The Students Technical Council has been allotted a budget apart from the gymkhana funds to help compete in technical events, but even some student representatives were unaware of the same. So, reaching out to the students is a priority.

**Speaking of student leadership, the SAC is becoming increasingly accountable, and with initiatives like SMP and ARP students are taking up the duty of encouraging their own**

**juniors into making IIT Roorkee a better experience. What are your thoughts on such initiatives?**

**Director:** I would say that the student leaders should be proud of their contributions. Their attitude towards suggestions is also quite receptive. I am impressed with the way they carry forward various initiatives. However, there is this issue of mentorship which I believe needs more attention. Seniors have to be careful while suggesting things to their juniors. For freshmen, whatever their seniors say is the sole truth and they are like to follow it blindly. In my view, IITR being an academic institution, shouldn't be a place where students blindly follow anyone, not even the Deans or the Director.

**I must address the elephant in the room, mental health has been found to be a major issue in the IITs. We did take some steps like the YourDost app, but the response to the same was not as positive as we would have liked. What are some other steps that we should be taking?**

**Director:** I believe that awareness will

solve half of the problems. After clearing JEE, only the brightest students come to the campus, and these students have ambitious goals. Sometimes they aren't able to achieve the target they set for themselves. Learning to deal with such situations is extremely important and the earlier this realization dawns upon them, the better it is. In an IIT, opportunities are abundant, and even if you do not succeed somewhere, you can very well succeed in one of the many others waiting to unfold.

We recently carried out a survey for YourDost. I wished we had more responses. Nevertheless, we are considering starting one more service in parallel, which would be dealing with the unfortunate incidents on the campus. We have increased the number of counselors and hope that the students feel the difference.

But it is important to realize that the problem isn't limited to any one section of the students, it spans across all the programmes, be it UG or PG. We are steadily working towards it and I'm hopeful that the results of the same will be visible in future.

We have created the office of a Students' Ombudsman, specifically to address situations when a student has a problem with some faculty member. The Ombudsman has received several cases and has been able to help in a few of them. The very notion of having an Ombudsman reduces such cases as all the stakeholders realize that everyone is open to scrutiny if the situation requires. Furthermore, the Students' Ombudsman Office would be giving feedback to the Director. Addressing mental health problems wasn't the main reason for its creation but a proper functioning of that office may be able to help alleviate some of it.

**We have a cosmopolitan campus of sorts, and we've seen our campus turn more inclusive towards international students, with a student-representative among them being elected recently. Are there some more initiatives we have planned to ease their tenure here?**

**Director:** Well, first of all, I would like to share the fact that among the IITs, IIT Roorkee has the highest number of international students. We have planned to enthusiastically participate

in the new initiative of the Government of India, known as the “Study in India Programme” wherein we would be reaching out to foreign countries for getting more students interested in our institute.

In addition to this, a programme is to be launched by the government in which 10 public institutes and 10 private institutes would be given the status of ‘Institutes of Eminence’. These Institutes of Eminence are supposed to have a fair share of international students.

Working towards this goal, we have also established an office of International Relations, headed by an Associate Dean (ADIR), who is addressing how more of our students can get opportunities abroad, like internships and exchange programmes, and also how we can get more foreign students. The ADIR works with the DOSW as well as the DORA.

**One issue that was reiterated by the student community was that we don't have a lot of international faculty or international collaborations. Why is it so? Are we taking any steps towards this?**

**Director:** I agree we need more international faculty. Inviting distinguished professors for a whole semester is often difficult as their commitments don't allow them to stay abroad for long. We are trying to get them, as well as other distinguished Indian faculties, for short visits. Departments have been requested to identify distinguished professors in India as well as abroad. These professors would be given positions of Distinguished Visiting Professor.

**One thing that keeps being brought up here is that IIT Roorkee faces a ‘geographical disadvantage’. Do you really think that is an issue?**

**Director:** This issue didn't exist one or two decades ago. But these days, getting an outstanding faculty is sometimes difficult because spouses also have career aspirations, and a metropolitan has more opportunities for them, as compared to the vicinity of our campus. So it won't be wrong to say that sometimes people are reluctant to take up offers because of lack of opportunities in Roorkee for their spouses.

**A lot of our laboratories are in a dilapidated state. Apparatus and**

**instruments in some of them don't work, and this invites a major revamp. There are also frequent complaints on the student discussion forum about the poor state of infrastructure in hostels. Ravindra Bhawan, for example, has had a few cases of collapsing roofs in the past year itself. Can something be done about this?**

assessment of the bhawans from which complaints have come. The inauguration of a new bhawan is scheduled in a month and we have laid plans for the construction of another bhawan as well. Renovating and fixing the problems in bhawans may need their vacation. The construction of the new bhawan planned may also facilitate relocation of students.



**Director:** Our campus has been facing some such failures and these incidents have been brought to my notice. Estate and Works is looking into the structural

In the meantime, the DoSW or the Director can be approached, if a grievance is not seen to in a reasonable time by the concerned person(s).

Regarding the laboratories, every department was recently allocated dedicated funds for teaching labs and common facilities, so we can expect some improvements. It is my earnest request to the student representatives to make use of their membership in the Department Academic Program Committees (DAPC). Such issues can be raised by the students at the department level, not as complainants but as stakeholders. If some problem needs urgent attention, it can be dealt with higher priority. In case heavy funding is required, some time would be required. In general, these things are manageable by knocking at the right door. We are a public institute, hence every problem can be dealt with if the stakeholders are vigilant and active.

**Can we think of the free, all-access entry of boys and girls in each others rooms, even if only in a predefined duration of the day?**

**Director:** I wish it was allowed. I would say that we should change at a graded pace, and not push things too hard. The most difficult change has been done already by doing away with the restrictions on girls.

**You've always believed that academics at an IIT isn't about making students "industry ready", but more adaptable when they graduate. Could you please elaborate on your thoughts?**

**Director:** I often get complains that we have an outdated syllabus, and our graduates aren't industry ready. My reply to this has been that an academic institute like IIT isn't meant to create products which will have a shelf life of 5 years or 10 years, but we want our students to have a shelf life of 50 years. No cyberspace or internet was there in the 1980s but IITians from that era are still able to start up with cybersecurity companies because they were trained to think and analyze. So I'm not unduly concerned about what industries want our graduates to be. But at the same time, we can't be too far away or completely disconnected from the industries. There has to be a right mix of abstraction, theory, recent technology, and science. If the mix is good, the graduates will have long years of productivity and creativity.

**How do the conventional disciplines like Chemical Engineering or Metallurgy or Mechanical Engineering or**

## **Polymer Studies fit into the increasingly IT-oriented atmosphere?**

**Director:** In recent years, all disciplines are getting more opportunities. We have a patent regime where ideas and innovations can be patented leading to incubation possibilities. In some streams, the B. Tech. degree isn't enough. If you are trying to get a job in industries which are IT-oriented, and not in education or research fields, the B. Tech. degree could be sufficient, else you would need a higher degree.

## **Are we in the process of introducing new, traditionally non-engineering courses, with the help of the Dept. of HSS or the DOMS?**

**Director:** Just a few days ago, I had a meeting with 35 faculty members, in which we discussed the introduction of a new academic programme focused on environmental science and technology, which would also work as a Think Tank. Thus, we can give a single window to the outside world which is looking for guidance on environmental issues so that whatever science and technology exist can be absorbed while keeping in mind the financial, regulatory and

policy issues. More such programs can be thought of. The Humanities department ought to be expanded and would have to play an important role if we want to grow as an institute.

## **A lot of importance is given to the rankings of institutes in the country, and globally, too. We also have a Committee for Ranking Analytics set up in our institute which focuses on analyzing our rankings vis-a-vis other institutes. What are the measures we are taking, and how can the students help?**

**Director:** According to me, these rankings are of extreme significance as we want the best students and faculty to come to our institute. The system of rankings is still evolving and we need to make sure that we keep climbing up. We need to hire more faculty and have more sponsored funding, while constantly improving the profile of publications. It gives me a nice feeling to see IITR at the top of the 'citations per faculty' ranking according to the Times of India and the Hindustan Times. But we have to cover quite a distance on other fronts while retaining our strengths.

**The alumni activity in the last couple of years has been more visible than ever. What role do you think our alumni are playing, other than the obvious monetary donations and industry connections?**

**Director:** One of our biggest weakness is that we are short of faculty. Good faculty is in short supply everywhere and every IIT lurks around to grab them whenever an opportunity arises. We are trying to create a system to identify potentially good faculty applicants and a fast decision-making process so as to not lose them. A list of alumni in foreign universities has also been compiled, and it will be shortly shared with the heads of the departments, who will then use our alumni network to identify good faculty candidates and encourage them to apply to IIT Roorkee. This activity, if successful, will be way more important than the usual donations.

**Your social media handle is fairly popular among the students and the faculty at IIT Roorkee. What has been the idea behind having a Facebook page for your office?**

**Director:** I have always desired to reach out to all the members of the institute community. While I don't want to dwell on this issue again, we need to figure out a more effective way to reach out to each other. I thought this could be one way of reaching out. I don't think I have been very active on that, but yes, occasionally, as much as I can be.

**How do you perceive IIT Roorkee's position on the global academic canvas in the next ten years?**

**Director:** The institute has a lot to take pride in, and we need to make efforts to get those things out in the public domain. Our weaknesses sometimes overshadow our strengths. All our shortcomings should be dealt with within the institute while the strengths should be projected. With the brimming student achievements over the years, we need to reform the image of IITR as the place where students can do so many different things to cultivate and demonstrate their talent and creativity.

# TRUST THE GAME OF LIFE

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For the lack of time, you copied collaborated on your assignment with a random classmate. You thought you would get away (since both your roll numbers were quite far apart) but your luck was out, and through a series of unfortunate events, the professor eventually found out. Now, you and your co-conspirator have been called, separately, for questioning. The following scenarios are presented to the both of you:

**Scenario 1:** Both of you rat on each other, and each suffers a fall of 3 grade points

**Scenario 2:** Both of you stay silent, and each will suffer a fall of 1 grade point.

**Scenario 3:** You rat on him, while he stays silent. You get away scot-free, and he has to repeat the course.

**Scenario 4:** You stay silent, but he rats on you and you have to repeat the course, while he gets away scot free.

The above example can be cited as a modern extension of the Prisoner's dilemma. On the most fundamental level, the dilemma offers one a chance to stay silent (cooperate) or to accuse the other of wrongdoing (defect). Scenario-2 appears to be the best possible scenario for both the players, but owing to a lack of trust in each other and a willingness to let the other person face the repercussions for both your actions, it is almost never

played out. Since a player's own payoff is higher given a particular opposing move whenever he/she defects, defecting is the dominant strategy here. Thus scenario-1 plays out most often and is the Nash equilibrium for the above game resulting in a penalty of 3 grade points for both players as opposed to a fall of 1 grade point had they trusted each other and stayed silent. This is not just a thought experiment but a framework that is present in and affects one's daily life profoundly.

Additionally, given that people are self interested, such situations always produce sub-optimal outcomes. This is a disaster; we are stuck in interactions which promote the erosion of trust between people. Interactions where trying to make better decisions leave us worse off. However - instead of some random person - had there been a good friend of yours, you probably would have chosen to stay silent (even with personal biases taken into account). There is a stark difference in how a person would react in the two aforementioned situations; this arises not from some misplaced sense of friendship but from the fact that the latter scenario is more likely to affect your future interactions with this person. Whenever there is a possibility of a similar repeated interaction in the future, one is more likely to be defection-averse since they risk losing

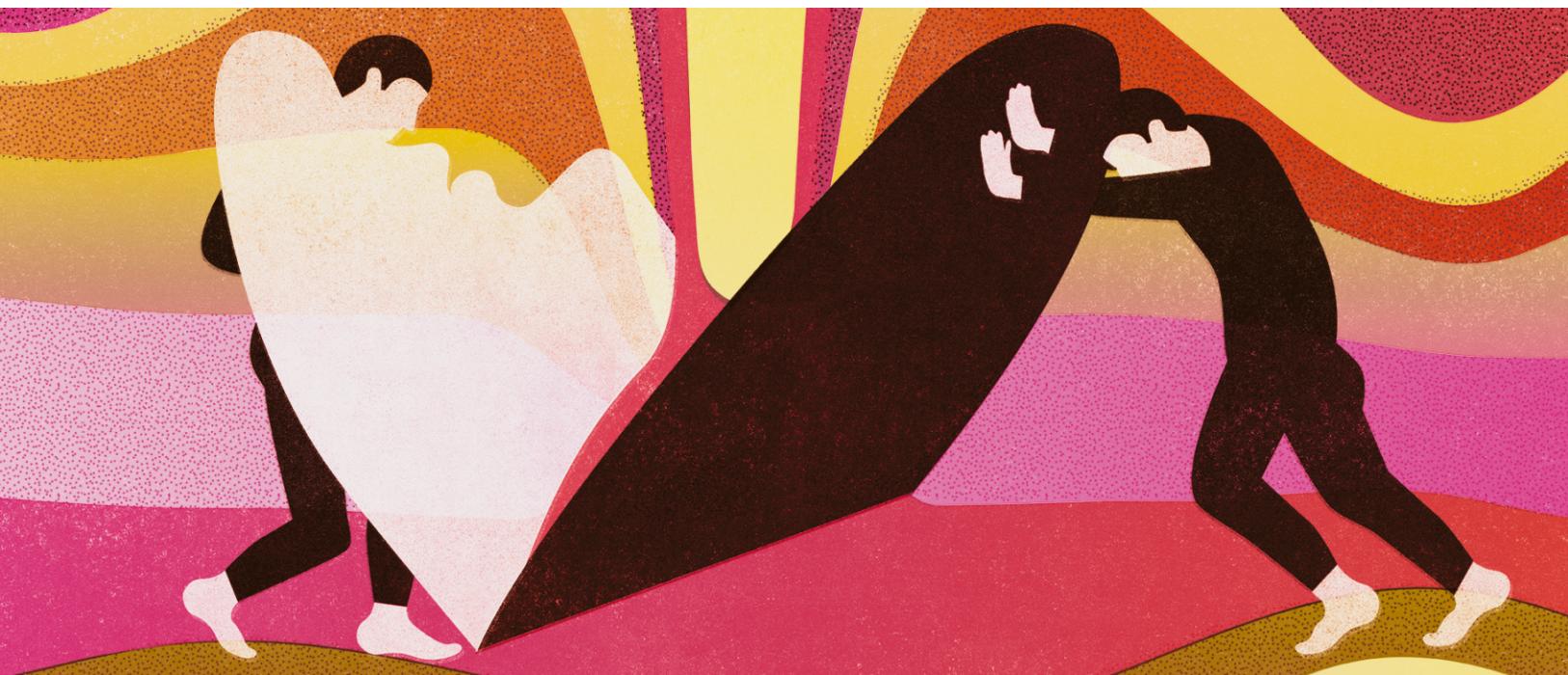
social credibility and any possibility of making the most out of the interaction. And this concept, right here, of repeated interactions, is the key to creating scenarios that lead to the optimal outcome; the key to establishing trust.

No matter how strongly we feel against playing games in our relationships, we are; any social interaction is a combination of many games played over time. Each person on this campus is a ‘node’ in a variety of social ‘networks’. Every player is looking for a positive payoff and in that pursuit, he may flip his strategy to favour his ‘friends’ and to anti-coordinate with ‘non-friends’ (you can’t like everyone in your network). The people you bunk

classes with, the ones you play DOTA with and even your family WhatsApp group are all social networks with you as one of the nodes. Most often, the players in these networks are not exclusive to a single web in your life.

But what is the basis for these social networks? A common interest? For a time, perhaps it is.

But it may not always be the reason for the sustenance of that network. Attending the same class(es) or a shared hatred for one of the faculty could perhaps be equated to the roll of a dice, but they do not decide the outcome of the game in the long run. Often underestimated and



increasingly dissipating, the entity we believe to be the foundation, walls and roof of any strong social structure, is trust. When you go to class, you trust your professor to be there on time to teach you. When you eat food in mess, you trust mess administration that the food won't be poisoned. A farmer grows food trusting that he will get a fair price in the market. An employee works trusting that he'll be paid at the end of the month. We give up some liberties to cooperate with government and trust that our government will put up laws and regulations that allow us to sleep peacefully at night.

In this game of life, cheating seems to reap the maximum short term benefits but we don't find everyone cheating, because we trust other people to be fair and hence act fairly ourselves. Society works on mutual cooperation; in a situation where everyone seeks to maximize personal gain and forgo social contracts, a widespread chaos (rooted in mutual distrust) would ensue.

Let us consider another example to understand this on a larger scale: On June 1, 2017, President Donald Trump announced that he would withdraw from the landmark Paris Agreement on climate change. It was drafted in 2015 by 195 nations, with 147 ratifying it (including the United States, the world's second largest greenhouse gas emitter). Let us analyse this decision from a Game Theory view-

point.

To understand the short-term gain, we would have to enter a rather woeful locale, the President's head. Being part of the treaty, US would have to pay a significant sum to the Green Climate Fund, which would, indeed, far outweigh the contributions from many others. Therefore, others would profit without spending a dime. And - even if Global Warming wasn't a Chinese hoax, and the Paris Agreement were implemented in full, with total compliance from all nations - "it would only produce a two tenths of one degree Celsius reduction in global temperature by the year 2100. Tiny, tiny amount."

On studying the long term implications of this decision, it is blatantly obvious that this is nothing short of a disaster for America; abdicating U.S. responsibility in climate change mitigation and the coming clean energy transition is likely to make other international negotiations more challenging, particularly with respect to trade. It would call into question the word of the United States and weaken its ability to call on other countries to work on other global threats, such as global terrorism. International agreements are not achieved in a single month or a year. The Paris treaty - which the United States had a heavy hand in creating - was crafted carefully as a series of nationally determined, voluntary com-

mitments precisely in order to gain worldwide support , with the understanding that countries can adjust their commitments as needed. Walking away from that agreement sends a clear — and foolhardy — message to all other countries around the world: Do not trust the United States.

Being selfish may be tempting at certain instances, but a win-win game is always more beneficial in the long haul. We say that the environment today restrains the evolution of trust, but isn't each one of us the environment of the other?

Be the one to take the first step. Hoping to gain a trustworthy companion every time is perhaps, as foolhardy as hoping for two sweet helpings with a single coupon in the hostel mess . But as we so often play smart there, we can do the same in our social lives; you should expect nothing less playing the most complicated game on the planet. As Nicky Case puts it in his highly engaging game to understand the evolution of trust, “In the short run, the game defines the players. But in the long run, it is us players who define the game.”



*Fin.*

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