

● Voice of a Gen BITSian

The Problems:

- 1. No access to high-speed Internet as most of us do not have wifi routers installed at our home.** As a result, most of us are surviving on the mobile internet data provided by our mobile network operators, which has a certain daily limit. This mobile internet has a much slower speed and a weaker network than the internet we can avail in the campus. This makes it really difficult for us to write a three-hour comprehensive examination without any interruptions due to the poor internet connectivity.
- 2. Lack of books, class notes and other study material.** On 14 March 2020, when we were informed by the institute authorities to vacate the campus, we were told that **the college will remain closed till 31st March 2020**. We were neither informed nor we had the idea regarding the seriousness of the situation and that the college will be closed for more than 3 months. As a result, almost all of us have not been able to bring home any books, class notes or other study material. This will affect our preparation adversely and will have a destructive impact. Not in any way we are blaming the institution but we are as badly affected as the rest of the world is.
- 3. Poor quality of online lectures:** The institute showed great intent in trying to organise online lectures for the students. But the online lectures were of very poor quality. Not blaming any professor, who tried their level best. But most professors were using the online method of teaching for the first time, which made it very difficult for them to teach the students any concept. Moreover, **most of the students could not grasp the content well**. Even worse, many students have poor internet connectivity and **could not even access the lectures**. Taking an online course without teaching the requisite course material properly will be a huge mistake on the institute's side and hamper the students. Students of Jammu and Kashmir don't even get proper 2G speed due to the critical situation of the place. Similarly people who are residing in the Amphan affected area are not even able to get signals for calling or even electricity and at such a time, god knows how much time it is going to take for the news of courses to reach upto them.
- 4. Regular electricity issues in many areas:** As we all know, India is not a 100% electrified nation with 24-hour electricity. There are several areas where electricity issues occur for hours at a stretch and several times a day. Many students belong to such areas. This will seriously harm them while writing the comprehensive exam and also while preparing for the same.

5. **Heavily packed daily schedule due to internships/PS-1 and hence no time to prepare for compre:** All 2018 batch students and a large number of 2017 batch students are involved in Practice School-I and summer internships respectively. This leaves hardly a few hours daily to prepare for their compre exams. **Balancing both internships/PS-I and preparation for compre exams will be a seriously herculean task for them.** Moreover, asking them to do the same will be inhumane, as you can see clearly.
6. **No access to laptop:** Many of us went home before holi and hence have not brought our laptop with us. This will not just hamper our preparation, but make it impossible to write the comprehensive examination in an online mode.
7. **Lack of an environment at our homes to allow us to focus on preparing for compre:** Most households have been heavily affected by the global pandemic, which has caused healthcare as well as economic disruptions all over the world. The ripples have also been felt in Indian households. Businesses have stopped bringing any kind of revenue. Most companies are laying off their employees during these times. This has affected the financial condition of most houses. As a result, the atmosphere in households is not one which particularly supports BITSians preparing for compre. **For example, a house where the father has lost his job or received severe pay-cut or has his business shut would not allow the son/daughter to concentrate on preparing for compre.**
8. **Huge mental stress for students living in containment zones:** As we know, there are hundreds of containment zones all around India. These zones have been ear-marked by the Government to possess maximum risk of COVID-19 infection. A large number of BITSians are living in such COVID-19 hotspots and containment zones. **The situation there is such that the risk of being able to stay safe from infection is huge. People are scared and mentally affected due to such an atmosphere.** I really do not think the BITSians there can concentrate on preparing or even writing the online compre exams.
9. **Cyclone amphan hit areas:** On 20 May'2020, cyclone Amphan hit the eastern coast of India, mainly West Bengal and Orissa. There are hundreds of BITSians living in those areas. They must have been seriously affected by the cyclone's wrath and destruction as well. **In such a situation, where our city/town is in shambles, our houses maybe seriously affected, the roads are water-logged, the shops and grocery shops are closed, maybe our businesses are closed or affected heavily by the cyclonic damage- how can the institute expect the BITSians in those areas to prepare or write exams?** They are barely getting day to day ration.
10. **First yearites not having access to laptops:** Many first year (2019 batch) students do not purchase laptops in their first year as they are not sure of the correct model to buy. These students use PCs in IPC or their mobile phones to access slides. How will they write the comprehensive examination in an online mode? It will be utterly

inhumane and unethical to ask them to buy a laptop just for the sake of writing an online exam.

11. Pre-final and final year students also preparing for other exams like CAT, UPSC, GRE etc: A large number of pre-final (2017 batch single degree and 2016 batch dualites) and final (2016 batch single degree and 2015 batch dualites) are preparing for prestigious competitive examinations like CAT, UPSC, GRE, GMAT, GATE, etc. They aspire to carve out a career path in that direction and make themselves as well their institute- BITS Pilani, proud. Owing to the **announcement of the months of May and June as official summer vacation**, many students have started preparing for these exams and joined online classes for the same. It will be utterly **difficult for them to manage compre preparations while carrying out their preparation for competitive exams.**

12. Final year students with/without job offers: More than 90% of our institute's final year (2016 batch single degree and 2015 batch dualites) have got job offers from multiple companies. Kudos to the institute! But due to the current pandemic and economic disruptions, many students are worried about their job offers after listening about many offers rescinded by companies in IIT Delhi, IIM Calcutta etc. Asking such students to prepare to write compre examinations, while **they are suffering from huge stress and anxiety, worrying about their job offers** is certainly inhumane. On another note, some final year students are also being asked to join their companies early. Again, preparing for compre examinations while working a full-time (work-from-home) job is not going to be a manageable task for any BITSian.

The suggestions and a humble request:

Many institutions around the nation (**like IIT Kanpur, IIT Bombay and other prestigious institutions**) have come to a conclusion that, either they will award the grades of the current semester based upon the completed evaluations and assignments or they will conduct the examination after the return of students. We all know that BITS has a system of Practice School-2 that will be a hindrance in conducting examinations especially for the pre-final (2017 batch single degree and 2016 batch dual degree) students. But due to the pandemic crisis, since everything is being delayed this can be delayed too. Students don't have any issues on giving exams when they return to the campus but it is sure that **online exams can really shatter our hopes and aspirations and most of us won't be able to perform as per our preparation.**

There are many other subtle problems that we all are aware of, a student faces at home but it cannot be discussed in a generalized manner because it is very native to oneself and are not being mentioned here. Being one of the top engineering institutions in India we know that our institute comprises students that are from every part of the country along with many foreign students as well. We are blessed to have guardians like you who are guiding us in our career objectives, away from our home and helping us in every field to secure our future and to achieve whatever we want to do in our life . Being such a humble and helpful

guardian, please be kind to listen to the problems of every BITSian and please take the decision wisely because it can affect the future of more than 5000 BITS Pilani undergraduates. Please don't give the reasons that since online classes have been conducted, it's compulsory to conduct examinations etc. as we all know that education is for learning not for proving our learning through examinations especially in these tough times . Please think wisely and consider all the problems of the general BITSian mentioned and come up with a decision that will be a boon to all of us.

Another method could be that if there are students who are very keen on having online exams, should be given an option of attempting them and in that case they should be awarded grades in a similar manner as in a usual semester, for the rest of the students who opt for no exams should be passed with their CGPA remaining unchanged but their credits taken in this semester should be considered as completed. This would not create any incoherency and could keep both the sides satisfied. This can be in the **Pass/Fail model**.

Under a non resolvable condition, **online assignments** can be conducted which could be given with relaxed deadlines so that students affected can at least work flexibly on them. And this should be the last resort as this would also be a herculean task for a handsome number of students who are facing one or more of the problems listed above.