VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

INQUIRER

EDITORS NOTE

Yet another semester, yet another Inquirer, and yet another set of issues. Or are they? Inquirer's purpose, as we perceived it was not only to write about issues in IIT, but also to present certain radical ideas that could go a long way in improving the lives of the community. The mingling of the Internet in education & the advent of online courses have transformed the higher education landscape by providing an avenue for learning outside of the four walls of a classroom. The reasons that draw students to take online courses are manifold: the freedom to dabble in new areas, flexibility in pacing courses and gaining knowledge in specific fields that might not be offered by one's university. For starters, we have a feature on NPTEL and an examination of the possibilities of its integration into the mainstream curriculum.

We present the stories underlying the numbers—why is there a shortage of faculty, what makes people want to join IIT Delhi & what could potentially improve the situation? Next up, we bring you an article on infrastructural developments taking place on campus and a closer look at where we stand where space & student strength is concerned. The penultimate article speaks of a snake that rears its head every year; the issue of hygiene & cleanliness in campus. We analyse what the administration has done to address some of the problems raised by students pertaining to the hospital, and cleanliness in IIT. The last course: a piece on the feedback system: the flaws in the attitude of both parties toward the process &, is course feedback condemned to remain just another academic rigmarole or can we find a way out? We hope you've got space for dessert--The Bluffington Post, is what you get when you add a sprinkling of humour & satire to a cocktail of our unique campus idiosyncrasies.

Why do we write? What are we aiming at? If any of these segments made you see something in a new light or pause, even if for a split second, & wonder at how things could be different, we would have achieved our motive. We remain grateful to all the professors and students who supplied us with information, ideas and opinions—the essential ingredients without which it would have been impossible to create this edition of Inquirer.

We'd also love to hear your feedback--bon appetit!

Dhananjay Gupta
Nayantara Mudur

#04
HEALTH, HYGIENE, HOSPITAL
PAGES 10-11

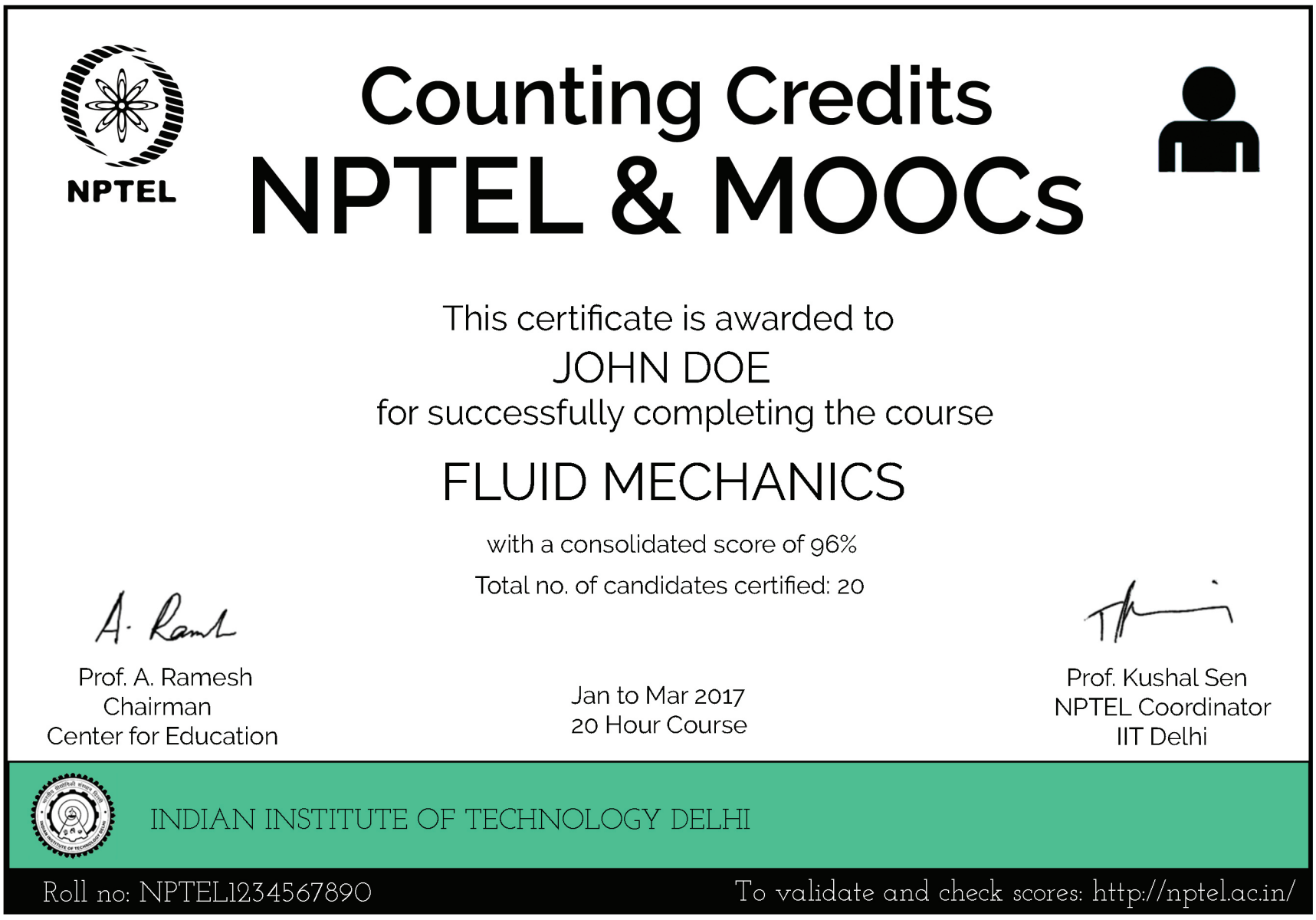
#03
ROOM FOR MORE:
A STORY OF SPACE
PAGES 8-9

#01
COUNTING CREDITS
NPTEL & MOOCs
PAGES 2-4

#02
FINDING FACULTY
MORE THAN JUST A QUESTION OF NUMBERS
PAGES 5-7

#05
FEEDBACK
A FEW CONTENTIOUS PROPOSALS
PAGES 12-14

#06
THE BLUFFINGTON POST
PAGES 15



A short background :

Higher education in engineering in India to this day sees a wide spectrum in terms of the available infrastructure, options and quality of teaching. Not everyone has the access to quality education institutions and highly qualified profs such as the ones at IIT. Certain local and private colleges even consider meritorious B.Tech./ M.Tech. students qualified enough to be assistant professors. It was to help the students of such institutes and provide them quality education for free, for which a MOOC platform for India was conceptualized. Methods for training young and inexperienced teachers to enable them carry out their academic responsibilities effectively are a must. The National Program for Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) can fill the gap and act as a competence building tool for junior professors as well.

To increase its outreach to students in various institutes across the country, NPTEL has constituted various local chapters in the country. These local chapters have a faculty mentor in the respective university who coordinate the courses and disseminate information. The mentor sees to whether the courses are active, students are submitting assignments, and provides able guides for the course. The local chapters aim to have a huge impact in the local colleges' students, assisting their academic growth significantly.

What does it currently offer?

The NPTEL project had been segmented into phases. The first two phases aimed to create a basic database of most commonly taught science and engineering courses. The portal offers a variety of content through different modes of delivery. There are primarily two types of courses, web based and video based. The former consists of lecture notes while the latter has segmented videos based on each topic within the course.

Courses per phase :

Phase	Web Courses	Video Courses	Total
Phase 1	125	138	263
Phase 2/3	196	374	670
Total	421	512	933

*As of Dec 2015

Courses per IIT :

Course Type	IISC	IITB	IITD	IITG	IITK	IITKGP	IITM	IITR	Total
Video Course	60	69	47	25	190	211	226	61	889
Web Course	39	46	38	80	79	48	77	30	437
Total	99	115	85	105	269	259	303	91	1326

Phase 3 aimed to diversify the courses available on the website, as well as create content meant for postgraduate students. It also saw the initiation of the certification phase, and to create a formal framework for credit transfer.

Prof. Kushal Sen, the institute coordinator of NPTEL at IIT Delhi added that NPTEL is open to the commercial/industrial world. A faculty and a professional can give lectures in collaboration, and take the course from theory to application. If an industry finds the course specific to their work they can co-certify it along with NPTEL. This certification can be a powerful tool for students in their careers, and could very well see the bridging of the gap between industry and higher education. It could increase employability and provide the requisite skill-set to students for professional work.

Additionally, since the courses are distributed under a Creative Commons License, they can be monetised by private entities. NPTEL also allows companies to use the course free of cost for training purposes of their employees.

What lies in the future :

The fourth phase aims to expand on the possibilities of certification and formal inclusion of NPTEL courses into the curricula of institutions.

Not all courses on NPTEL are available for certification. A separate portal "https://onlinecourses.nptel.ac.in/explorer" exists to handle certified courses. The courses run for the duration of a semester, during which enrolled students can watch videos, ask questions and complete assignments. At the end of the semester, a student must give a proctored examination at a convenient centre, to obtain a certificate.

As a part of the government's initiative to push use of technology in education as well as other sectors, it has set up SWAYAM; or Study Webs of Active -Learning for Young Aspiring Minds to provide the best teaching resources to everyone in the country through a digital platform. This is accomplished by sourcing content not only from NPTEL, but also from other universities across the country in a number of disciplines such as law, linguistics, history, natural sciences and many more. SWAYAM accomplishes this through a four-pronged approach:

1. Video Lectures
2. Specially prepared reading material that can be downloaded/printed.
3. Self-assessment tests through tests and quizzes
4. An online discussion forum for clearing the doubts

Although these courses are available free of cost, students desirous of a certificate are required to pay a nominal fee. At the end of each course, there is an assessment of the student through a proctored examination and the marks/grades secured in this exam can be transferred to the academic record of the students. The proctored exam is organised jointly by the local chapter of NPTEL, and the institute administering the course. UGC has already issued the UGC (Credit Framework for online learning courses through SWAYAM) Regulation 2016 advising the universities to identify courses where credits can be transferred on to the academic record of the students for courses done on SWAYAM.
At the same time, these guidelines are not binding in nature and UGC permits institutions to formulate their own policy. The guidelines place a cap of 20% on the number of credits out of the total that may be obtained through MOOCs hosted by SWAYAM. This move is primarily targeted to institutions wherein there is unavailability of staff for teaching certain courses, or facilities for certain electives are absent.

MOOC Policy at IIT Delhi :

As of now, IIT Delhi does not have a proper MOOC policy in its curriculum. The UGC guidelines have yet to be discussed and implemented in IIT, and can only be done so if passed by the Senate. Such a policy would go far in enhancing the flexibility in terms of what students can learn and study, and possibly provide incentive for extra course-work as well.

It would also introduce flexibility in student's schedule, making it easier to pursue endeavours such as start-ups and semester-long internships while simultaneously earning credits despite not attending classes. A small poll (~200 respondents) conducted online indicated a large positive response to this idea.

It is thus pertinent to get an idea of what policies some other colleges and universities follow pertaining to credit transfer via MOOCs. The following section is a small study of the same.

MOOC Policies across Colleges :

IIT Madras - Permits students to transfer credits from NPTEL courses. The procedure for doing so is as follows:

1. Student intimates academic section about the completion of a course by a letter from the faculty advisor and HoD.
2. Student forwards certificate of completion (after giving the required proctored exam), they must forward a copy of the same requesting for credit transfer. This must be approved by the faculty advisor.

For now, this provision is only available for 'Free Category' credits, which are the IIT Madras equivalent of OC's. Yet, credit transfer may be permitted for core courses if the HoD of the department concerned deems fit. IIT Madras has a different credit structure from IIT Delhi, but the academic policy seems to suggest that up to 3 courses worth of credits may be completed through this method. However, these coursesdo not count towards one's GPA, and only add to a student's credit count.

This completion appears on the transcript without any grade, with the details of the course and associated number of credits.

University of Leeds - While MOOCs have become an integral part of the education ecosystem in USA, it was only recently and almost hesitatingly that they started being implemented at a formal level in the United Kingdom. It was the University of Leeds that lead the way (no pun intended). UoL partnered with FutureLearn, a social learning platform owned by the Open University whose current 3.6 million users are primarily based outside the UK. To take a programme learners must complete a series of short open courses and buy a certificate of achievement for each.

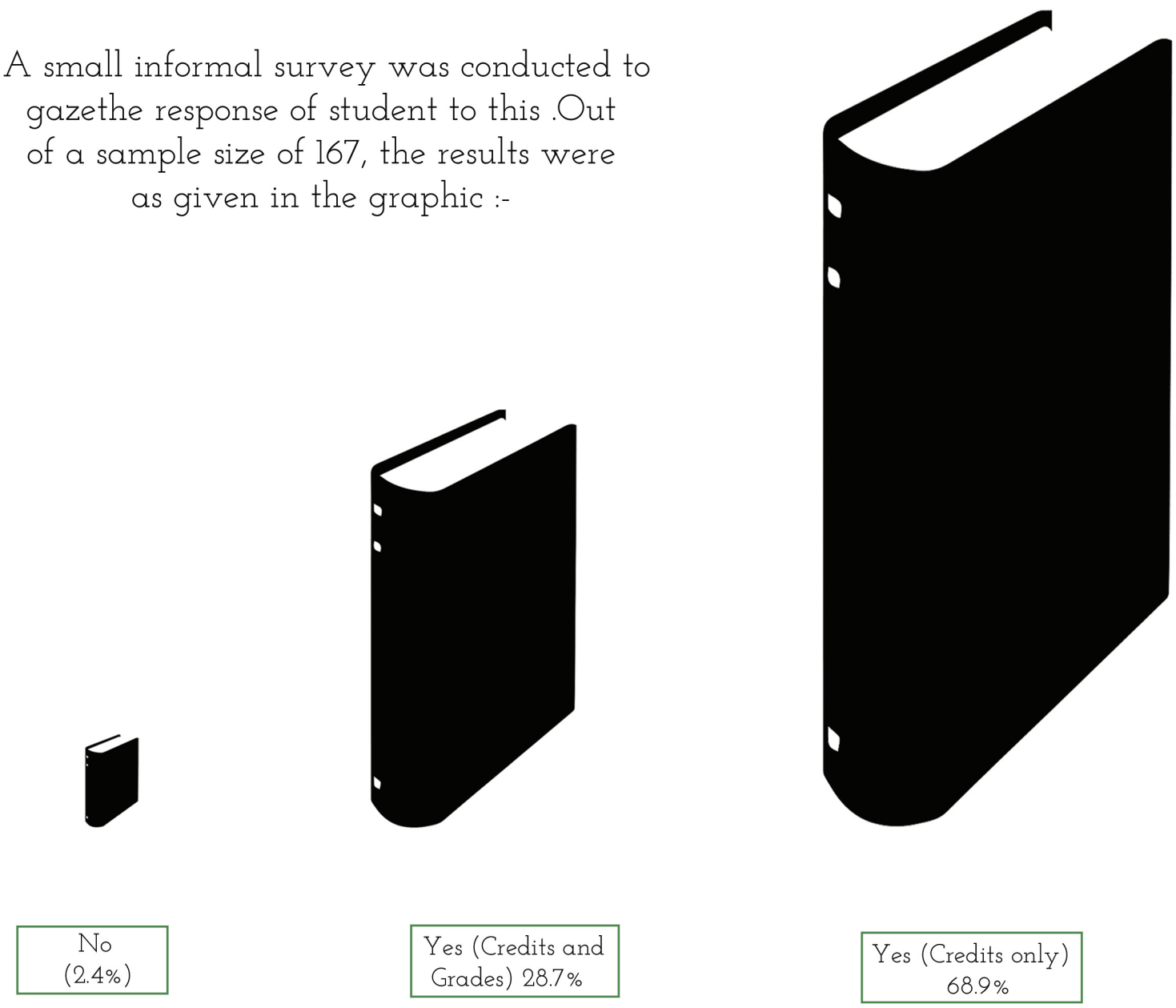
To complete programmes that attract an academic credit or offer a qualification, students may have to pay for and pass an assessment module Universities will award credit against the grade achieved which will then count towards degree.

Conclusion :

Proponents argue that MOOCs unbundle higher education, and hand greater control to students, enabling them to find their interests or pursue subjects outside their major. On the other hand, they may not offer the kind of feedback of a traditional course. While making education more accessible, they may devalue the actual learning process and be unable to substitute a brick-and-mortar class, as evidenced by low completion rates, low grades and poor course quality.

Should MOOCs be transferrable to IITD curriculum ?

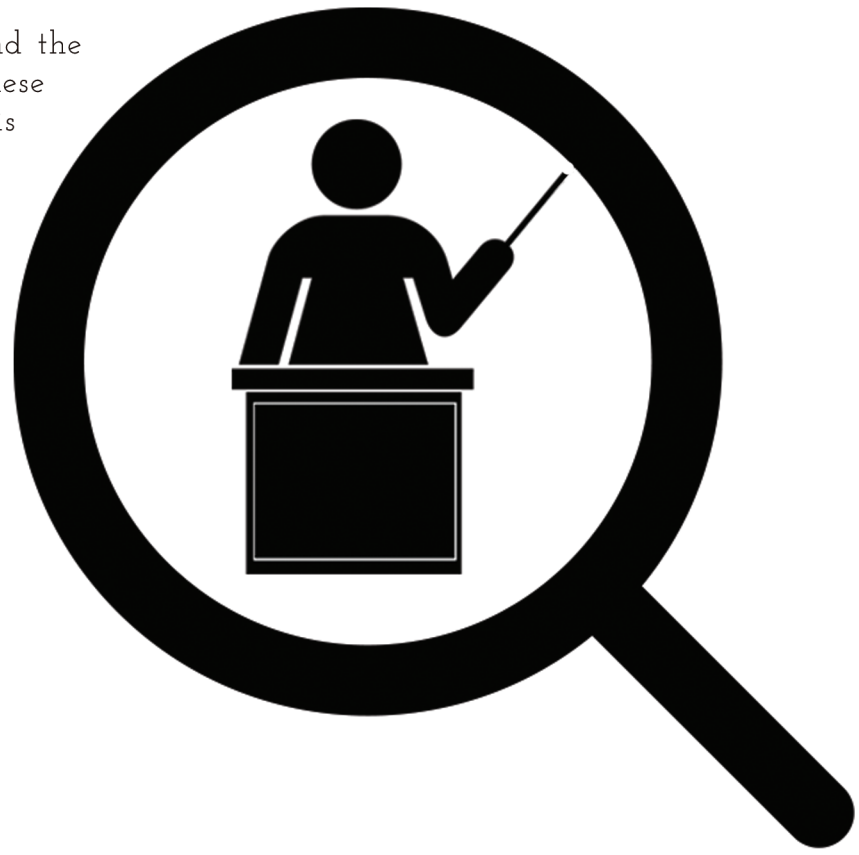
A small informal survey was conducted to gazethe response of student to this .Out of a sample size of 167, the results were as given in the graphic :-



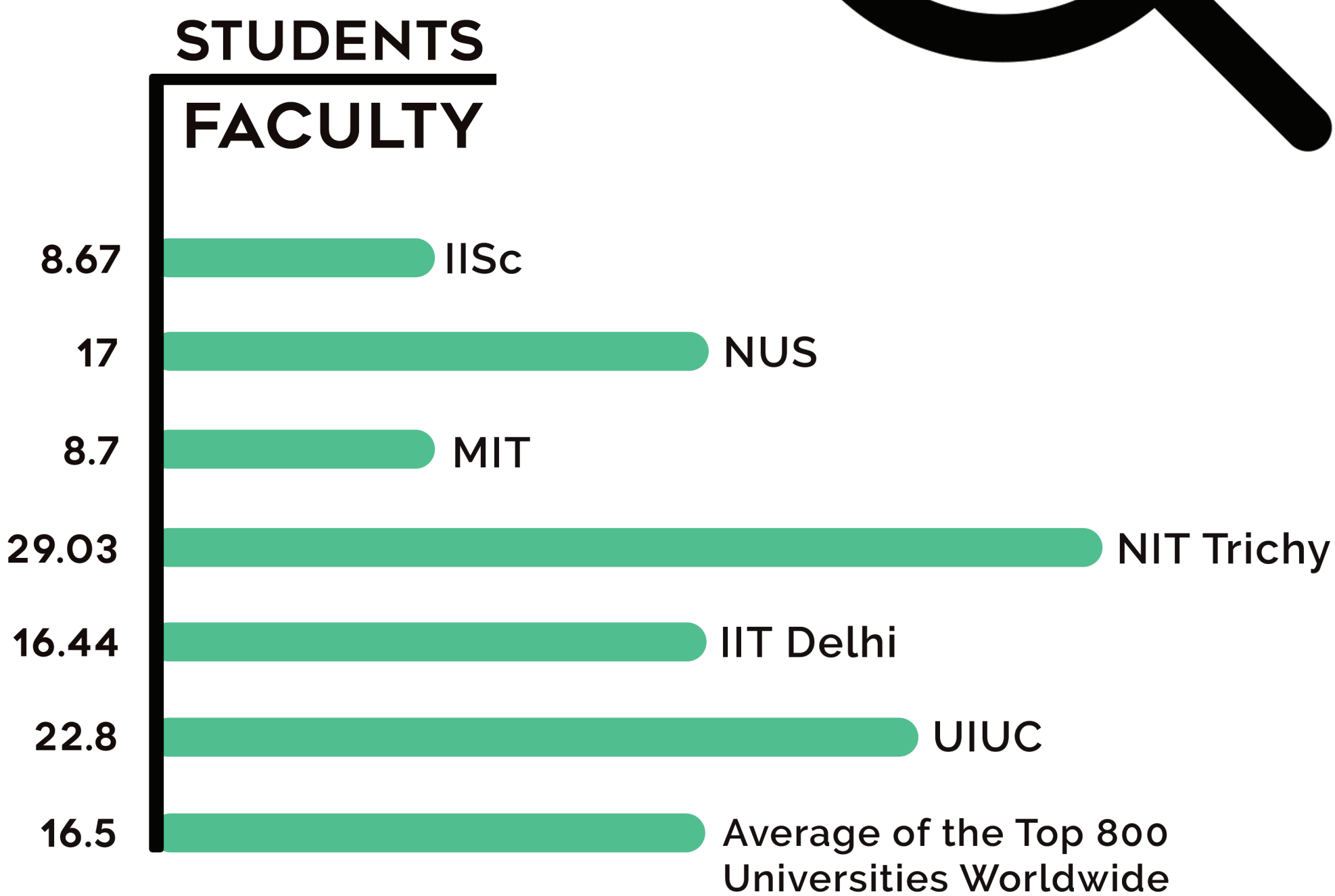
FINDING FACULTY

MORE THAN JUST A QUESTION OF NUMBERS

The Indian Institutes of Technology are synonymous with excellence and the national academic frontier. But, the IITs' ability to live up to these expectations in terms of research output and the quality of education is contingent on its faculty. However, of late, the shortage of faculty members in the IITs has been under the spotlight.



What is the extent of shortage? The sanctioned faculty strength is calculated according to the target faculty student ratio of 1:10. The sanctioned strength for 2015-16 stood at 776, whereas the number of academic staff stands at 537 today, which corresponds to a ratio of roughly 1:16. So where does the institute stand on this count, when compared to its Indian and global counterparts?[1]



Differing circumstances also affect the ratio: private research oriented US universities often have smaller undergraduate than graduate student populations and have low student per faculty ratios. The Indian Institute of Science, too, started its Bachelor's program in 2011 and has an undergraduate population of only 536, around a sixth of ours. That being said, from 1998 to 2015, while the number of students in IIT Delhi nearly tripled, the number of faculty members increased only marginally. With IIT Delhi's stature, one would presume that an academic position here would be highly coveted. This begs the question: why do we still have a shortage of around 30%, even as, several studies point toward the saturation of academic positions vis `a vis candidates in the West?

An important angle is the procedure for hiring faculty

The recruitment process involves three levels of scrutiny, with applicants sometimes waiting upto 2 years before getting appointed.

1. An initial shortlisting of candidates is done on the basis of essential requirements (PhD and at least three years of post-doctoral work), in addition to other criteria which vary from department to department, such as a minimum number of publications and the quality of journals they were published in.

2. The shortlisted candidates, deliver a seminar which is used to assess the relevance of their research initiatives, along with the candidate's ability to deliver knowledge properly

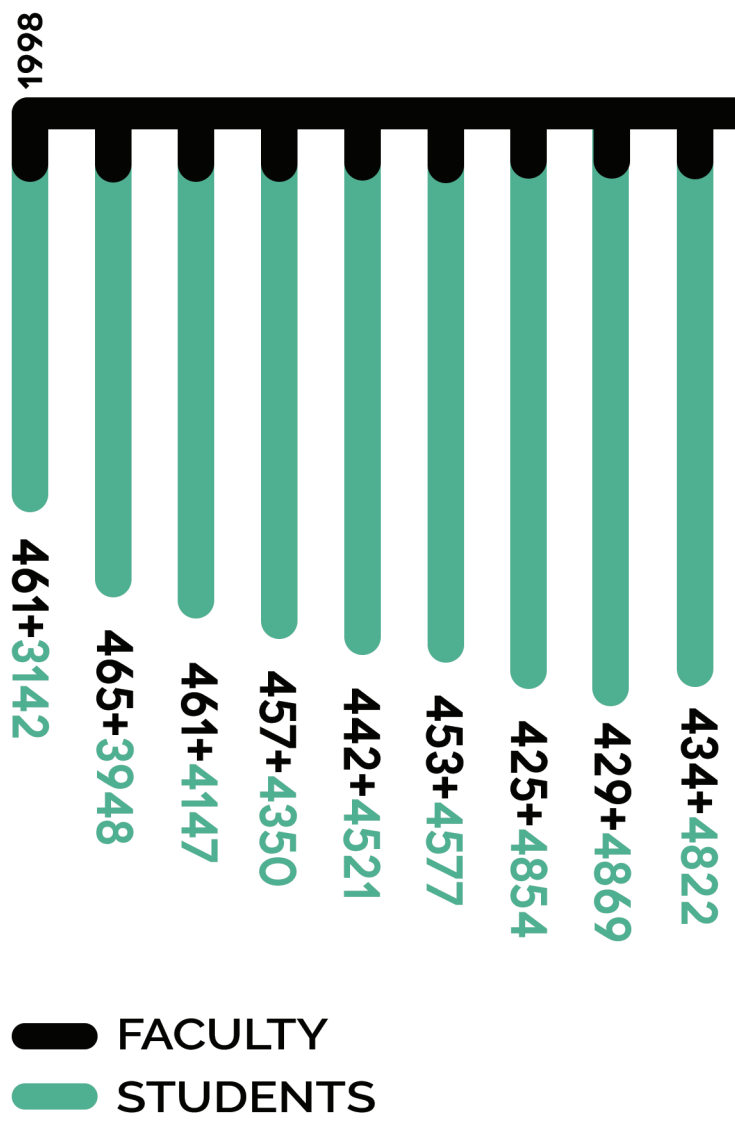
3. Those who qualify are interviewed by the Selection Committee, a panel consisting of experts in relevant fields and chaired by the Director, which selects the final list of people to be hired

In addition to potentially causing candidates to accept competing offers or not turn up (for instance, in one such hiring cycle in the Physics Department, out of the 80 candidates selected for the second level, only 32 appeared), the tardiness can also hurt the candidate's impression of the institute.

Several IITs, including IIT Delhi have thus moved to the rolling advertisement system which has improved response time. An applicant may apply anytime throughout the year for a faculty position in the department of choice. While some departments offer the flexibility of delivering the seminar remotely, candidates often prefer to visit, owing to the comfort of physical presence while delivering a seminar and the ability to interact with faculty and get a 'feel' of the institution.

Albeit lengthy, the rigor is meant to ensure that faculty is up to the mark. Moreover, hiring in the IITs entails significantly higher stakes than in industry: the choice is not merely who to hire, but who is suitable enough to remain a part of the department for quite possibly, the next four decades. Another factor is the applicant's area of specialization as departments often look to recruit candidates working on new fields to enhance the diversity and versatility of its research.

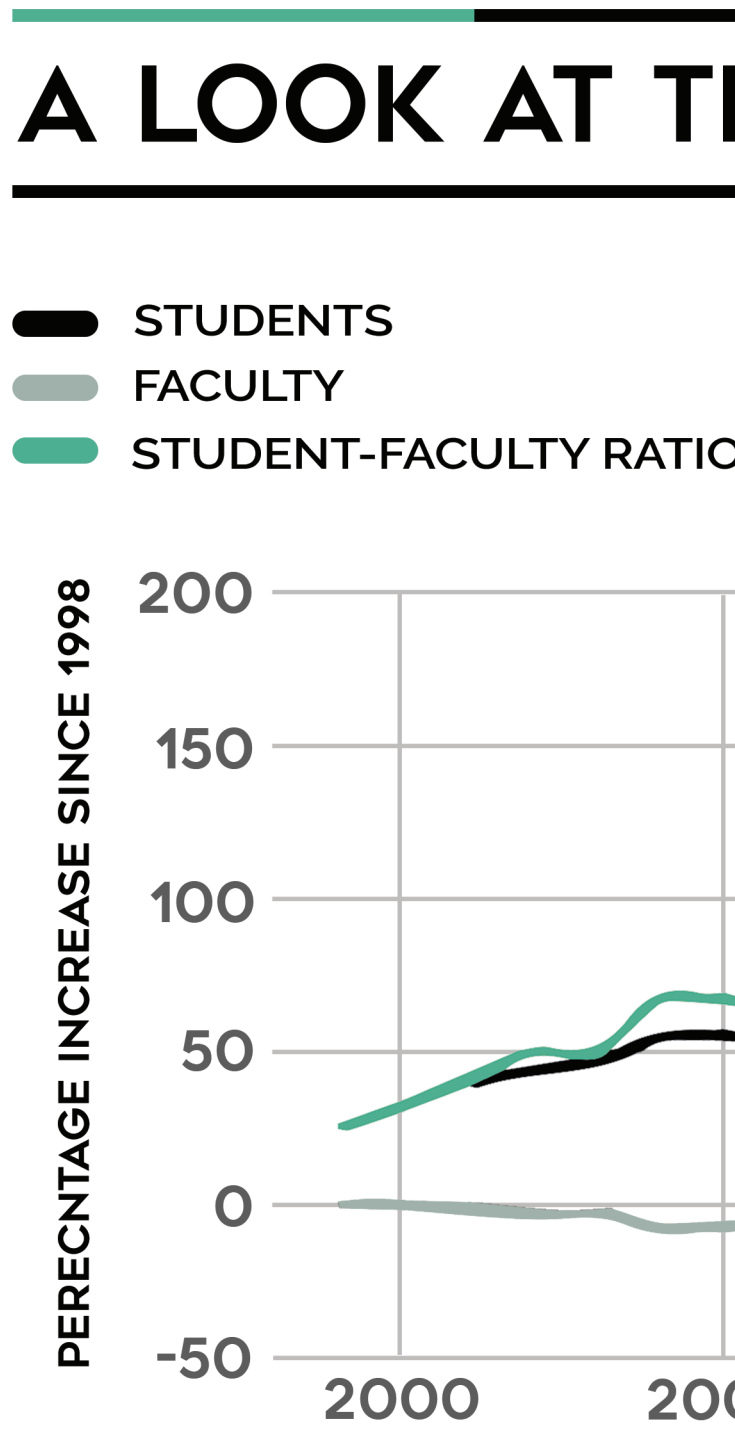
The significance of this investment makes the quantity and quality of the pool of candidates a crucial factor. "Until about 10 years ago, a larger fraction of the applicants were actually IIT undergraduates and went on to get their PhDs form good US universities and had proven credentials. The number of IIT undergraduates who have academic aspirations to pursue PhD have sharply declined (may be across other institutions too) and the current pool of applicants typically would have obtained their PhDs from various Indian institutions and done their post-doc work in US universities. The number of quality PhDs coming out of Indian institutions is still a fraction of our requirements", said Professor Sandeep Sen, Dean of Faculty.

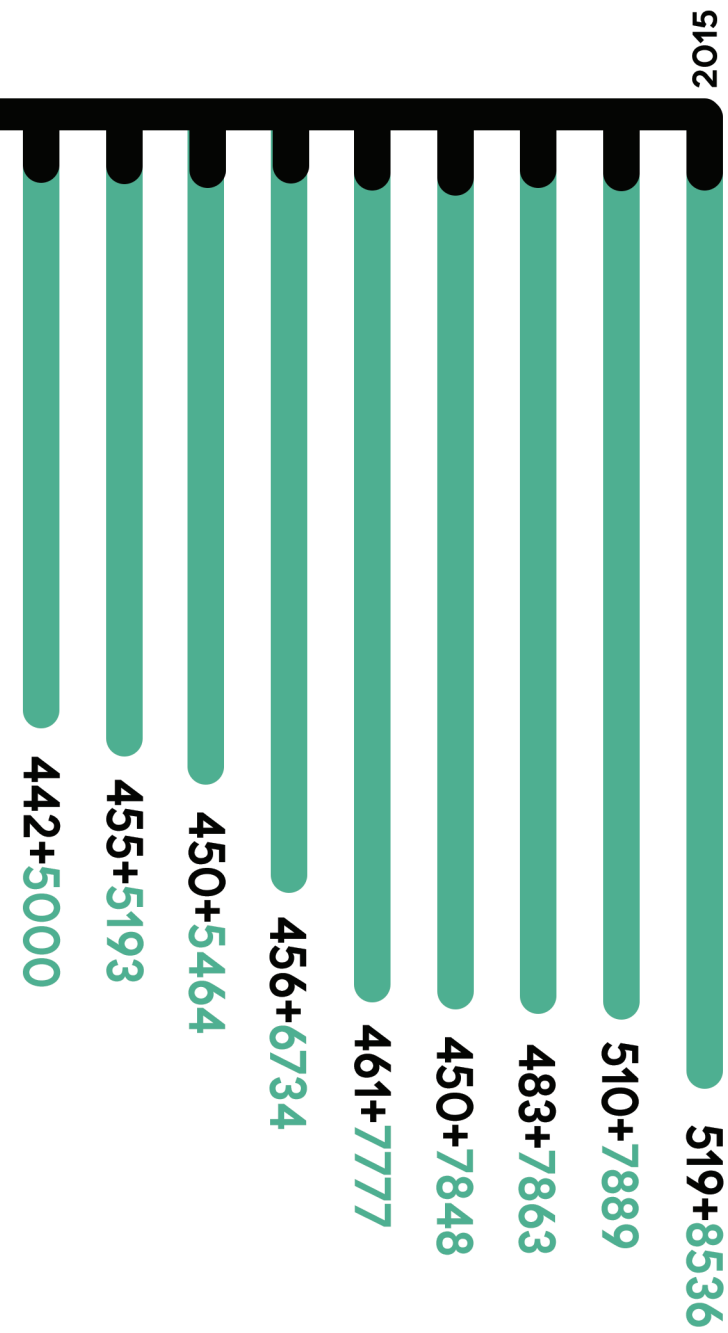


So what are the reasons that draw and deter prospective faculty from joining the IITs?

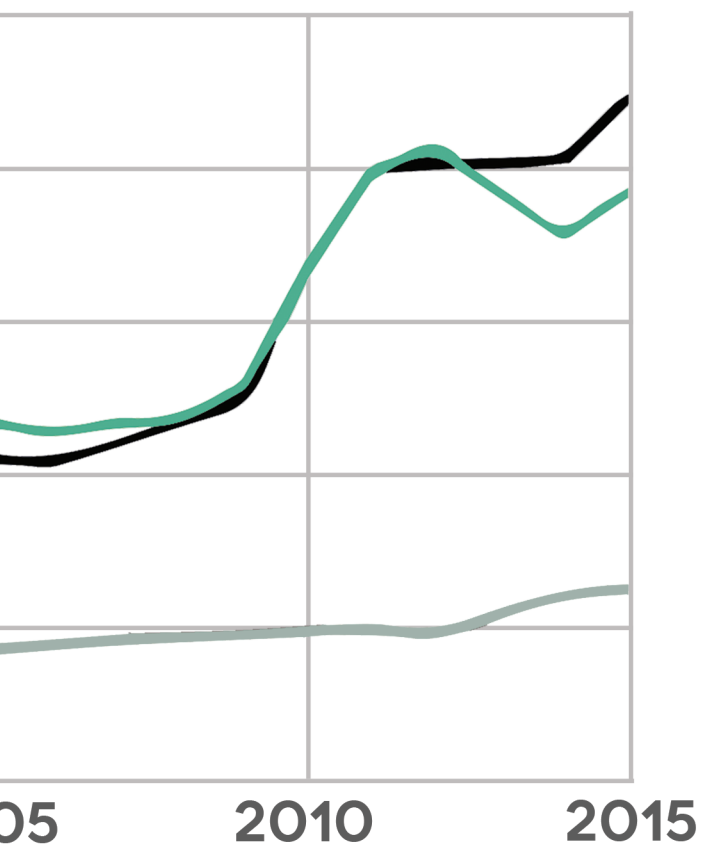
Academia in the US, which follows the tenure track system, is often viewed as extremely competitive. In this system, new recruits need to demonstrate exceptional research ability and produce outstanding work over 5-7 years, after which only an excellent performance would allow faculty to obtain a tenured position, involving indefinite employment.

As an institution following employment terms similar to government jobs, IIT Delhi doesn't have a tenure track system. The system of permanent employment means that post a 1 year probationary period, following which almost everyone is confirmed, a faculty member won't just be terminated in the name of 'underperformance'. This imparts a sense of academic freedom and flexibility by eliminating the 'publish or perish' pressure, which is regarded as a common feature of academia in the US?.





THE NUMBERS



However, apprehensions regarding funds, infrastructure and the scope for projects and industrial collaborations still serve as deterrents to returning to India. Concerns regarding one's research being adversely affected, owing to a relatively less developed research community also abound. "The Indian peer research community is smaller by orders of magnitude compared to that of the US or Europe", said Professor Sen, "Unless your work is appreciated by a large peer community it is difficult to sustain the toil of research." Some areas of research also lend themselves better to this move--while infrastructural limitations might stymie research involving large experimental collaborations to a greater extent, faculty engaged in working on social and developmental problems might find India a more apt setting for their research.

The reasons working specifically in IIT Delhi's favor include its legacy as a premier institution in the country and its metropolitan setting--certainly a factor where settling down in the long term is concerned.

That being said, the burgeoning of institutions like the IISERs and the newer IITs have increased competition between institutions for the same candidate pool, especially when considering that many prefer positions with lower teaching commitments in institutions like IISc or the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), which bereft of an undergraduate program, has a student faculty ratio of 2.2[1].

What is the way ahead?

There have been moves to attract more candidates, such as the faculty recruitment drive in the US, and monetary incentives like the Young Faculty Incentive Fellowship Scheme. However, hiring is not the only bottleneck involved: parallel development in infrastructure is necessary to accommodate the research needs of incoming faculty. And while there have been steps in this direction—the construction of the LHC freed up a lot of space in the old academic area to be converted into labs and offices—attempting to reach the sanctioned strength of 776 would require the existing academic space to be nearly doubled.

Other proposals have been made toward improving the system to address concerns relating to the quality of research in IITs. The 2011 MHRD appointed Kakodkar Committee report, proposed a rigorous mechanism of appraisals and a remuneration system partly dependent on the faculty member's 'performance' as gauged by awards and consultancy projects. Interestingly, one of the other suggestions was the introduction of the tenure track in IITs.

While this relies on the premise that the initial tenure track period would enhance research productivity, there are several impediments to this. The tenure track is often accused of coercing professors to opt for research pursuits which have a better chance of yielding more publications in the short term, at the cost of the freedom to pursue more long term, uncertain questions. Compounded with the fact that the absence of the tenure track and greater job security is one of the attractions that IITs have to offer, it is possible that this move would in fact discourage people from returning.

Overall, how would increased faculty numbers translate into tangible changes in the academic system? The Faculty Student ratio is often regarded as an easily quantifiable and objective metric of teaching quality. A higher ratio could mean smaller class sizes, greater individual attention for students and, for faculty--the boon of increased mobility and the ability to devote more resources to research commitments.

At present, in several departments, the same professors are known to take their courses every year. With more faculty members specializing in the same area, the need for a single person to take the same course annually would be resolved, and the time that one can devote to research or attending conferences, without periodic interruptions or missing classes, would increase. Practical benefits aside, as the icing on the cake--greater faculty numbers would bring us a step closer to realizing our longstanding dreams of featuring in the cream of the university rankings--the faculty student ratio alone accounts for 20% of the metric used for the QS World Rankings.

REFERENCES:

[1]: Ratios have been calculated using total student strength, Figures sourced from Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2017 & official university websites
[2]: Data sourced from Convocation Booklets and Annual Reports

ROOM FOR MORE

"Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place."

This description of the Red Queen's race from Through the Looking Glass, pretty much sums up the neck-and-neck race between rising student numbers and the administration's attempts to generate accommodation. Just a 1.3 % rise in the proportion of female students joining the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, this year was enough to underscore the shortage of hostel accommodation on campus. Several students had to be temporarily housed in alternative accommodation originally designated for staff. But concerns regarding the paucity of space are not a new phenomenon for the 325 acre campus. Convocation reports over the past several years repeatedly cite accommodation constraints as the main impediment to increasing the number of students. The report from 1990, with regard to the 8th Plan proposal for the institute, had, in fact, stated, "the plan has been formulated on the premise that the present campus has by now reached the physical limit of what it can support...Accordingly, the projected number of faculty and students has been frozen at the present level of 630 and 3,200 respectively."

Today, nearly three decades later, we stand at a combined student strength of over 8000. In this article, we hope to delve deeper into the likely projections of student strength in the near future, upcoming developments in infrastructure and the options that would perhaps have to be considered if the scarcity of space persists.

Five years down the line, one can expect two new boys' hostels in the mini campus, the area near Girnar.

Another six storey building is also being planned near the Nalanda grounds and is expected to be ready in 2.5 to 3 years.

Where we're at now and in future: the Students

Presently, around 8,000 students live on campus. The possibility of increases in student numbers, owing to the introduction of new Bachelor's programs and more female students, could potentially exacerbate the crisis and compete with the pace of development of infrastructure. While there won't be a new Bachelor's program in 2018, there are plans to introduce a Bachelor of Design program and open a Department of Material Science, in future, however, the impact that this will have on student strength is yet to be decided.

Where attempts to enhance the sex ratio in IITs are concerned, the targeted percentage strength of undergraduate female students is 14% in 2018, 17% in 2019 and 20% in 2020. However, according to the Chairman of the JEE, these are targets for the IITs as a whole, and will not be enforced on individual IITs. The number of undergraduates admitted into IIT Delhi will remain unchanged, at 851, in 2018 as well. The Associate Dean of Infrastructure, Professor Deepti Gupta echoed this sentiment in stating that, while expansion of accommodation arrangements is taking place, the increase in the number of students will not be directly linked to the increase in the number of seats in hostels.

What happened

The number of seats in postgraduate programmes were increased which resulted in the paucity of hostel rooms available for accommodation in the beginning of the session. Some postgraduates were shifted to the apartments near the girls' hostel, originally designated for professors and staff. All of them have now been allotted rooms in the hostels.

While the crisis this year was particularly exacerbated, issues in accommodation arise every year at the start of the semester. This can be attributed to several reasons: people out on internships

Let's hope, in spite of having the smallest campus of the 5 oldest IITs, students becomes a pro

A STORY OF SPACE

The A type quarters adjoining Himadri, which served as the temporary accommodation arrangements for the surplus Master's students, have been vacated and furnished. Consisting of single rooms with kitchenettes, they are ready to be given to girls working on projects, and are expected to be allotted sometime in the next few weeks. 48 seats are immediately ready for allotment and 24-36 more should become available by February 2018. By June 2018, 86 flats for girls are expected to be available.A new nine storey girls' hostelwith a capacity of 326 students is also being planned.

Engineering blocks (tentatively referred to as 99a and 99b) are being built adjacent to the LHC in order to accommodate the upcoming departments. Existing departments, like Civil and Mechanical Engineering, also need expansion in terms of labs and rooms, the scope for which will be provided by these new blocks. A number of buildings like those currently housing the Textile department, the IDDC and a portion of blocks will be pulled down and relocated there.

Upcoming Infrastructural Developments on Campus: Before and After

THIS YEAR?

can arrive upto a week or two late compounding hassles in room allotment and PhD students tend to vacate their rooms only after August or September when their thesis is submitted. Moreover, some B.Tech students stay back without permission even after completion of their degrees

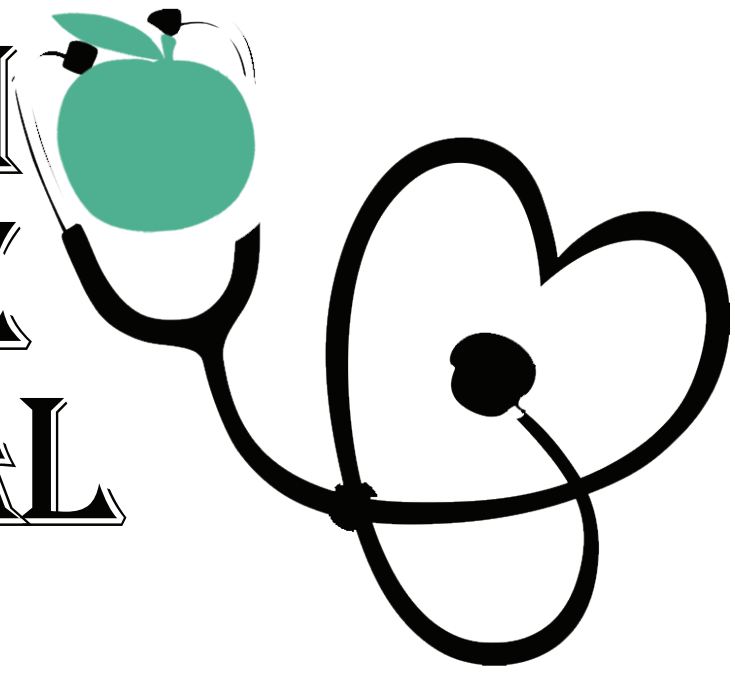
The Solutions

The administration has taken a number of crucial steps in order to address the space crunch issue and avert similar situations in future. As in the Director's recent mail, the administration is in talks with two private agencies for furnished accommodation outside the campus, particularly for PhD students, research scholars and staff. These plans are expected to materialize by July, 2018. While the choice of opting for external accommodation offered by Coho was floated for the first time in April 2017, owing to the lack of response, these services have not as yet started.

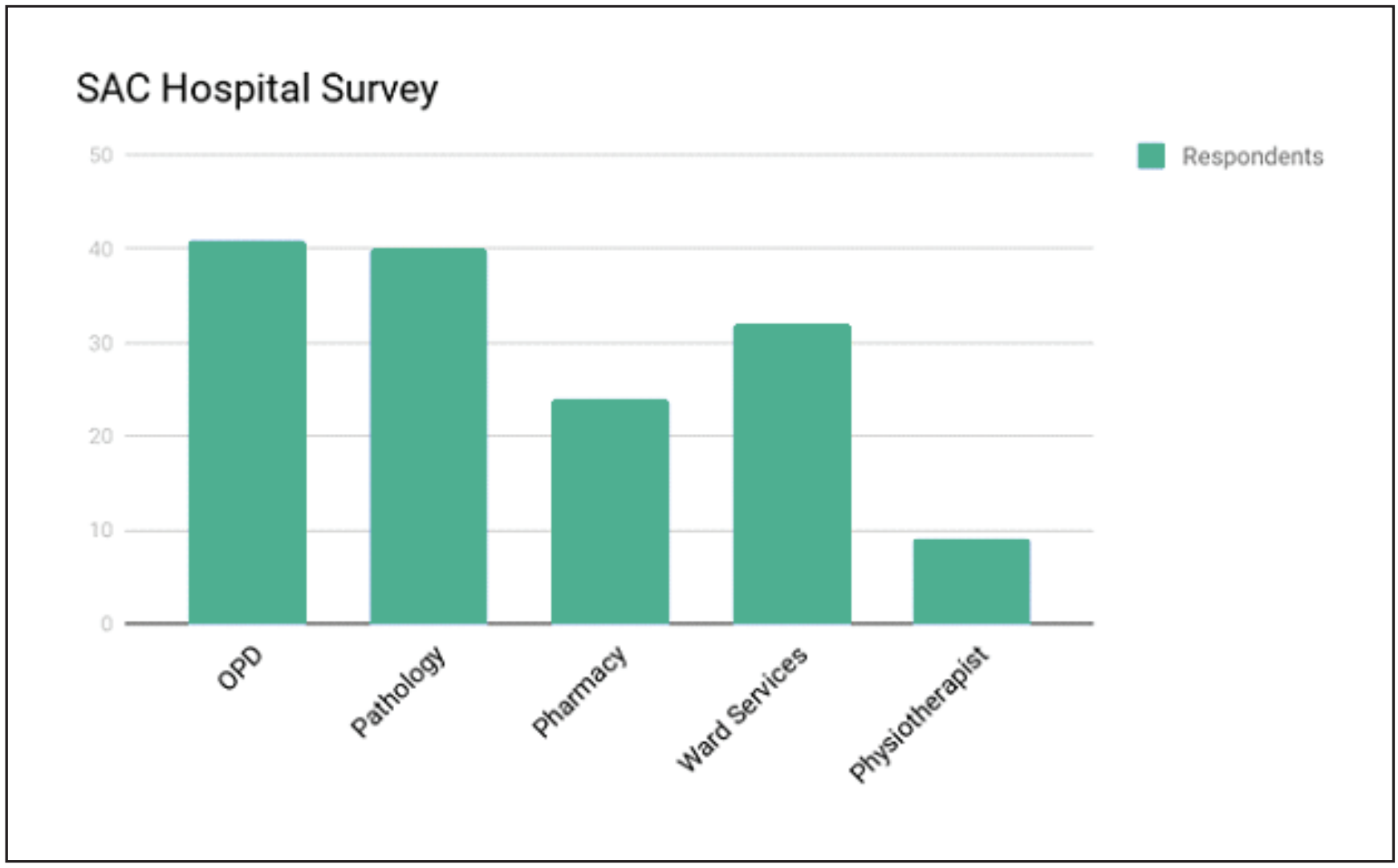
Other measures have also been taken in parallel with infrastructural development, to tackle the lack of space on campus. If the pace of infrastructural expansion still falls short of requirements, where accommodation for boys is concerned, the withdrawal of on-site accommodation to married scholars, is being considered. These students typically receive a Housing Reimbursement Allowance (HRA) and the apartments hitherto allotted to them will subsequently be given to students. In addition to increasing the number of available rooms, the administration intends to make room vacancy rules stricter, keep better track of people who haven't vacated their rooms even after the completion of their degree and include the provision of heavy fines for not adhering to them.

WITH THESE PLANS AFOOT, THE SPACE CRUNCH IN HOSTELS FOR INCOMING OBLEM OF THE PAST.

HEALTH HYGIENE HOSPITAL



Come August each year, coinciding with the entry of a new set of 800 odd freshmen, comes the spectre of Dengue. This is accompanied with a myriad of other problems, such as cleanliness in the campus, hygiene in the messes and night messes and the quality of food on campus. The BSP and the SAC make an attempt to check whether concerns from the past have been addressed and what new problems have arisen.



The SAC conducted a survey to gauge student's opinions about the hospital

Some of the major complaints and suggestions with regards to the hospital were:

1. Long waiting times

The queueing system at the hospital needs to be improved. As of now, the queueing is basically an informal system wherein patients coming in early enter first. A digitised token system can be set up wherein appointments for each doctor are granted through tokens.

2. Increasing the number of available doctors

Students feel that the number of doctors available in the hospital are inadequate. This can be addressed by tying up with specialist doctors from different hospitals, as well as inviting doctors from private agencies on a consultative basis.

3. Nighttime doctors

While severe cases of illness are not too high at night, students still feel that a full time doctor should be available at night to cater to emergencies.

4. Make the hospital's functionality coherent with the facilities

Given that the hospital lacks space, perhaps reducing the functionality and making it coherent with the facilities would be a good thing to do. Heavy medical tasks such as surgeries could be outsourced to hospitals outside campus through an MoU, whereas IIT hospital could be utilised better for First Aid, pathology, emergency services and operate essentially as a clinic, better equipped to deal with larger patient flow and less serious cases.

5. Patient Data

Patient data should dictate when doctors are available, and what sort of facilities are immediately required. So for instance, during dengue season when patient inflow is maximum, arrangements can be made accordingly.

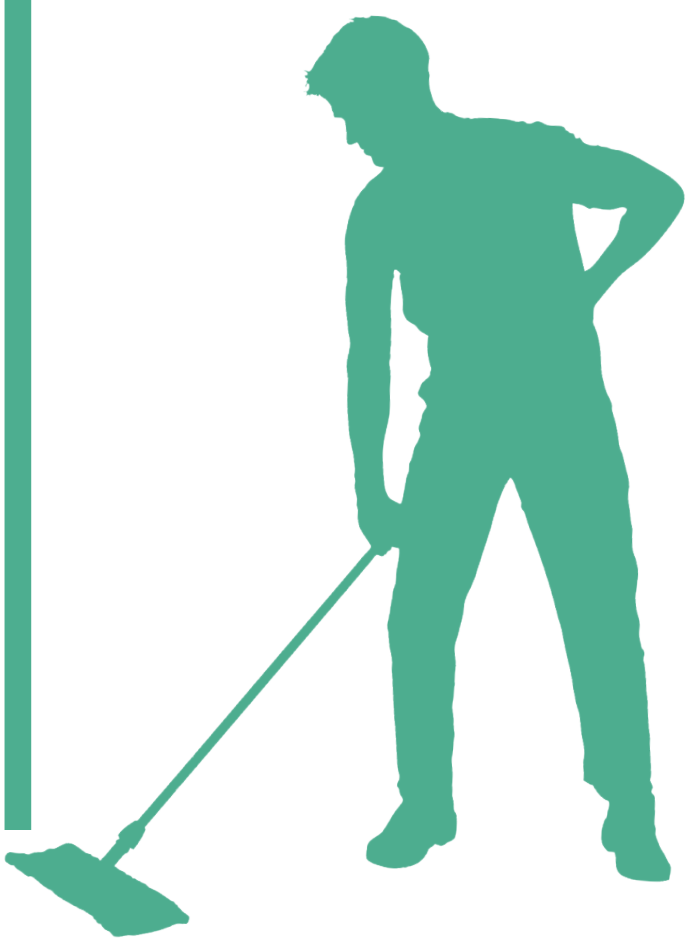
6. Collection of samples

Test sample collection timings for Dengue need to be extended beyond the limited hours they are as of now.

WATCHDOG

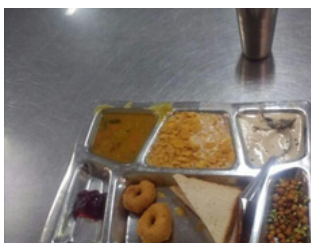
We talked to Dr. Brahm Prakash to find out what the administration is doing to address these issues. Here are some of the points he raised:

1. At night, the whole team with ambulance is present and a doctor is available on call. It does not make sense to appoint a full time doctor for the night time when the frequency of patients is low.
2. A project has begun to hire doctors from several agencies. A pilot had been run to this end, wherein the IITD hospital had hired three doctors from Apollo during the monsoons to cater to the increase in Dengue cases. The pros of hiring such doctors is that there is no need to provide them the same benefits as those mandated to government doctors. The BUG has already approved the creation of 6 specialist posts at the hospital, but this remains unimplemented due to the lack of consensus in the Hospital Advisory Committee to hiring private doctors.
3. The hospital is considering a move to allow students to directly call ambulances from different hospitals. This will allow them to go to hospitals of their choice, instead of the ones where the IITD ambulance took them to.
4. Students should check the availability of different doctors on the hospital website so they can make their appointment accordingly. A monthly schedule is available on hospital.iitd.ac.in which highlights the availability of all medical officers on each day of the month.



Hygiene in messes

This is a long standing issue that the student community has repeatedly raised in SAC meetings, maintenance meetings in the hostel and mess meetings. There is no dearth of incidents where students have found centipedes, cockroaches, hair, beetles and other 'exotic' varieties of insects in the food served in messes. With the recent incident wherein a dead rat was



found in chutney served during breakfast in Aravalli, this issue has attained an unacceptable and disgusting peak. This has certainly resulted in some immediate overhauls in the hygiene maintained in messes with the Director personally looking into this issue. There also have been demands to separate the mess fees and the accommodation fees components from each other, given that students prefer not to eat in the mess and yet have to pay.

Open drains

There are lots of small open drains and damaged drain covers on campus, a festering ground for mosquitoes during the monsoons. One such example is the drain next to Kailash. We were given assurances that the relevant authorities have been informed of this and that work has already begun. Also, the Dean of Infrastructure said they have been on the issue since past 3 months and there are plans to convert it into a sitting area and the naala into a 'stream 'or a 'Lake'.

Garbage thrown in campus

The initiative to make the environment in campus clean and hygienic is a two way street. It is unacceptable that students throw garbage - both wet and dry - in the the tree-lined area near Girnar, especially when there is no dearth of dustbins near this area. We posted about the garbage thrown at WindT after the textile fresher's party earlier this semester as well. We urge students using to exercise basic civic sense and not use campus as a garbage dump. There is also a lack of dustbins in the Lecture Hall complex, which needs to be addressed immediately.

Used plates of food left in hostels

While this is endemic to certain hostels where the policy against this issue is not so strict, it is a crying shame that students cannot commit to maintaining cleanliness. One cannot have the gall to bring a plate of mess food to their room, leave it outside after eating and then complain about the rats, flies and other insects that the rotting remains attract.

Bathrooms

The lack of hygiene in bathrooms is another comment on the almost absent civic sense in the students of IIT. Un-flushed toilets and wash basins clogged with trimmed hair are a common sight in the men's hostels, along with waterlogging and used sachets of shampoos on the floor.

FEEDBACK - A few contentious proposals.

Student feedback is an important aspect of pedagogy. For the instructor, it serves as a means to gauge student response to their course content, teaching methodology, evaluation and attendance policy and exam setting. It can also play a role in their career progression. The instructor uses feedback to create a better learning environment. For the student, it serves as a means to let the instructor know what they're doing right and what can be improved.

The efficacy of a feedback system is greatly increased in an environment where the student has multiple options and there are no caps on the number of students that can enrol in a course. Bad teaching will be rewarded with low enrollment and high drop-rates. This is only possible when students have high academic flexibility, which is not the case in IIT due to logistical issues.

Student evaluations of teacher performance are generally taken as an important measure of teaching effectiveness. However, they often misrepresent classroom realities. The ratings on the forms frequently reflect students' emotional experiences in their courses rather than pedagogy or the amount of learning. However, ideally an instructor's evaluations should include comments about difficulty, workload, grading policy and the overall learning experience they provide. Administrators need to bear this in mind in their assessment of student ratings so that they do not encourage instructors to teach in fear of their evaluations.

While we realize the importance of this mechanic to the classroom paradigm, it is also widely but silently accepted in IIT, that ultimately it serves no purpose at all. But why is this the case?

Why don't students fill feedback seriously?

The feedback portal is opened at the end of the semester, just after the end-sems. With a lot of free time on their hands, it is naturally expected that students would write a comprehensive feedback about their instructors. However, this is not the case. Professors state that response rates (where feedbacks that have been filled out thoughtfully and thoroughly) are moderate at best. Objective questions seem rushed through, and there are cases where professors have received 5/5 on all measures without any subjective comments. It is difficult to gauge the sincerity of the feedback in such a scenario. Subjective questions are the most important part of the feedback form, as they help an instructor actually understand what the student felt and expected out of the course. Unfortunately, they largely remain neglected, often answered monosyllabically. The students who do write a comprehensive answer, are often too few in number to actually be representative of a class-wide opinion.

There could be multiple reasons for this state of affairs.

One, the feedback being at the end of the semester will have no impact for the student filling it out. She must do this for the sake of other students, who may opt into the course in the future. Second, students complete the same form in class after class, semester after semester. Typically, three or four common templates are used at IIT Delhi, depending on the lab/tutorial component of the course and the credit distribution. Therefore, a case could be made for customisation of feedback forms, based on course/department. Third, there is also a perception that going through this process doesn't make any difference. Students do not usually hear from the teacher about changes that result from the feedback. Come next semester, it is not uncommon to see fellow students and juniors complaining about how the course is still being taught in the same ineffective ways as before. Fourth, sometimes a student may not even know the answer to a question asked in the feedback form. For instance, it may not be pertinent to ask "Was your instructor knowledgeable about course content?" since there is no way to objectively and comprehensively answer the same. Lastly, and perhaps this is something common to both students and professors, is that they just don't care. While one may paint rosy pictures of student-faculty interaction and invite constructive criticism on both sides, it is true to a certain extent that both stakeholders just don't care enough to make it work. This brings us to the second important question.

Why don't professors take feedback seriously?

Before we get into why professors may or may not take student feedback seriously, it is important to recognise why academia is fundamentally different from industry in this aspect. The industrial analogue of student feedback is customer satisfaction, indexes of which are an important marker of the performance of a company in its domain. Any slackening results in bad public relations, loss of market share and possible punitive action for the employees involved. This is not necessarily the case in academia, wherein multiple other factors such as one's experience, research work and academic credentials also come into play. Teaching feedback plays a marginal role in the career progression of professors, and gets increasingly sidelined in higher positions. Abysmal reviews can damage one's prospects, while good teaching could certainly augment the fledgling career of an Assistant Professor with mediocre research. For the sake of our readers, it is best to draw an analogy between research and teaching with CGPA and soft skills. A good CGPA will get you pretty far in placement season, but soft skills will certainly augment your profile.

Where student feedback does play an important role is for the teaching excellence awards, and faculty appraisals. These incentive systems attempt to ensure that teaching does not take a backseat, but their efficacy is certainly questionable. In our talks with some of the professors, we found out that more than anything it is one's colleagues that keep the pressure on one's head to do well in designing and teaching a course. For most, it is a matter of great shame to have bad teaching reviews or less students participating in their course due to negative feedback. This peer-policing mechanism is what implicitly drives instructors to revise their pedagogy according to student's suggestions. Professors also feel that if students were to start writing better feedbacks, they would be compelled to take action as well. This begins to take the form of a classical chicken-and-egg problem, wherein we seem to be stuck to the status quo.

What model prevails at IIT Delhi?

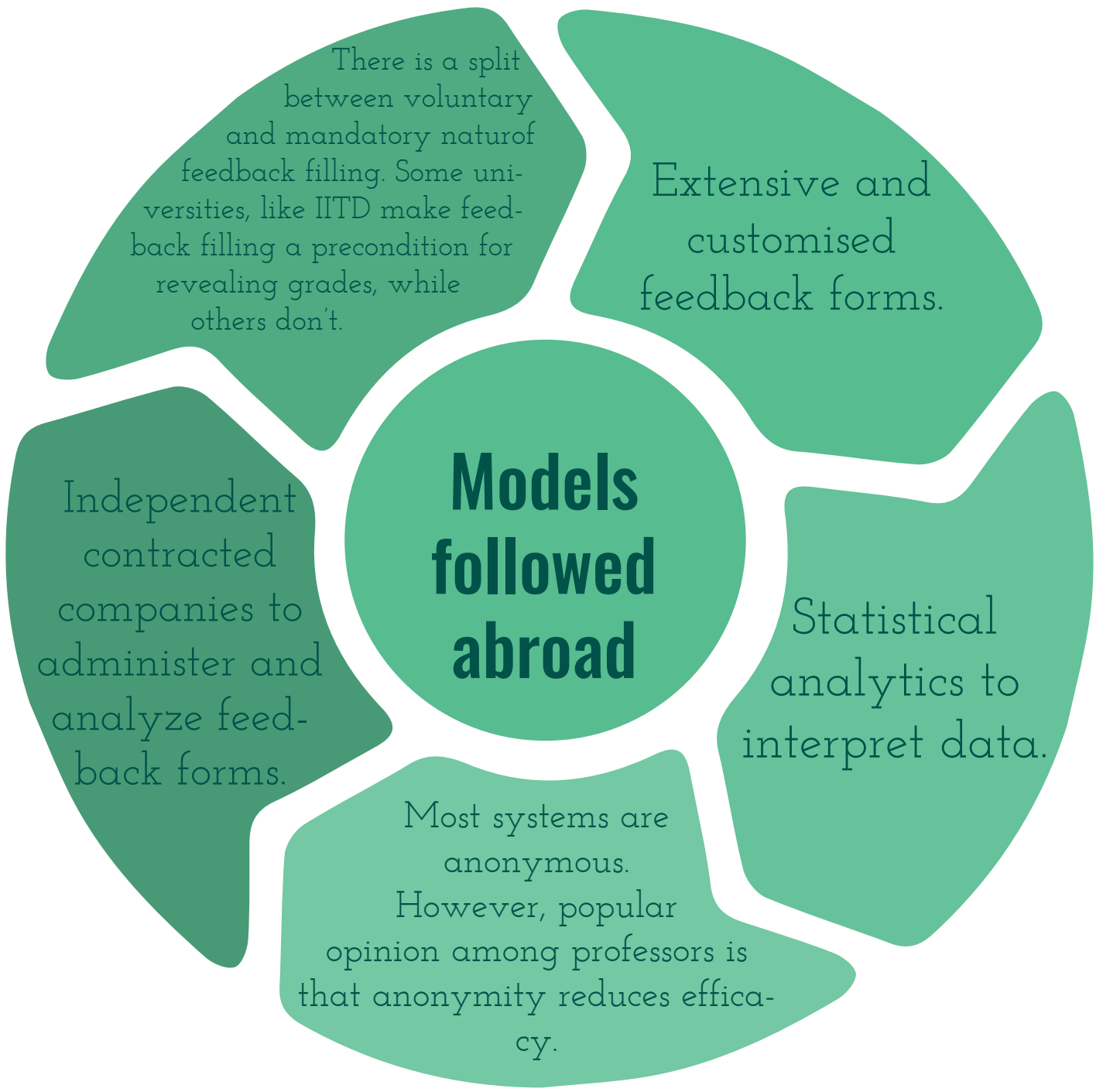
The feedback system in IIT Delhi is augmented with multiple statistical correlation tools to study the feedback depending on attendance and performance. Teaching excellence awards are presented to instructors every semester to faculty members on Institute Foundation Day to based on feedback. Feedback is also requested from industries on all activities that they participate in, including training and recruitment.

Once the grades have been submitted and locked at the end of the semester, the feedback summary is revealed to the instructor. This is classified into three types:

1. Feedback summary: Based on the student enrollment.
2. Attendance correlation summary: Based on the attendance percentage of students categorised into 3 brackets
3. Grade correlation summary: Based on the grades of students.

The system also displays the number of students that participated in the feedback, the cumulative rating, the ratings in individual questions the answers to the subjective questions as well. Course coordinators can also add their own custom questions to the feedback to make it more coherent with the course structure.

Interestingly enough, the portal also permits faculties to make their feedback summaries public, visible to other faculty. Given that this system already exists, it makes it much more easier to extend it to students as well. A publicly accessible course feedback summary would increase transparency and build a certain level of confidence on the system as well. It would also increase accountability on both sides, ensuring that students fill feedback seriously and professors act upon it. This seems to be the model followed in universities around the world, albeit with their own modifications and additions.



Objective Questions Summary

Section: Faculty Section

Question No: 1

Description: How your interest in Mechanics increased as a result of this course?

Rating / Response	Student Count
No opinion	30
Not at all	11
Very much so	72

Question No: 2

Description: Do you think you will be able to handle practical problems better because of this course?

Rating / Response	Student Count
Definitely	75
No opinion	28
Not at all	9

Question No: 3

Description: Do you think a laboratory component would help in understanding the course?

Rating / Response	Student Count
No opinion	34
Not at all	20
Would really help	58

Objective Questions Summary

Section: Course Organization and Delivery

Question No: 1

Description: How clearly was the course plan presented?

Rating / Response	Student Count
1 - Poor	0
2	0
3	1
4	1
5 - Excellent	3
No opinion	0

Question No: 2

Description: Did the course content met course objectives adequately?

Rating / Response	Student Count
1 - Poor	0
2	0
3	1
4	1
5 - Excellent	3
No opinion	0

What can be done?

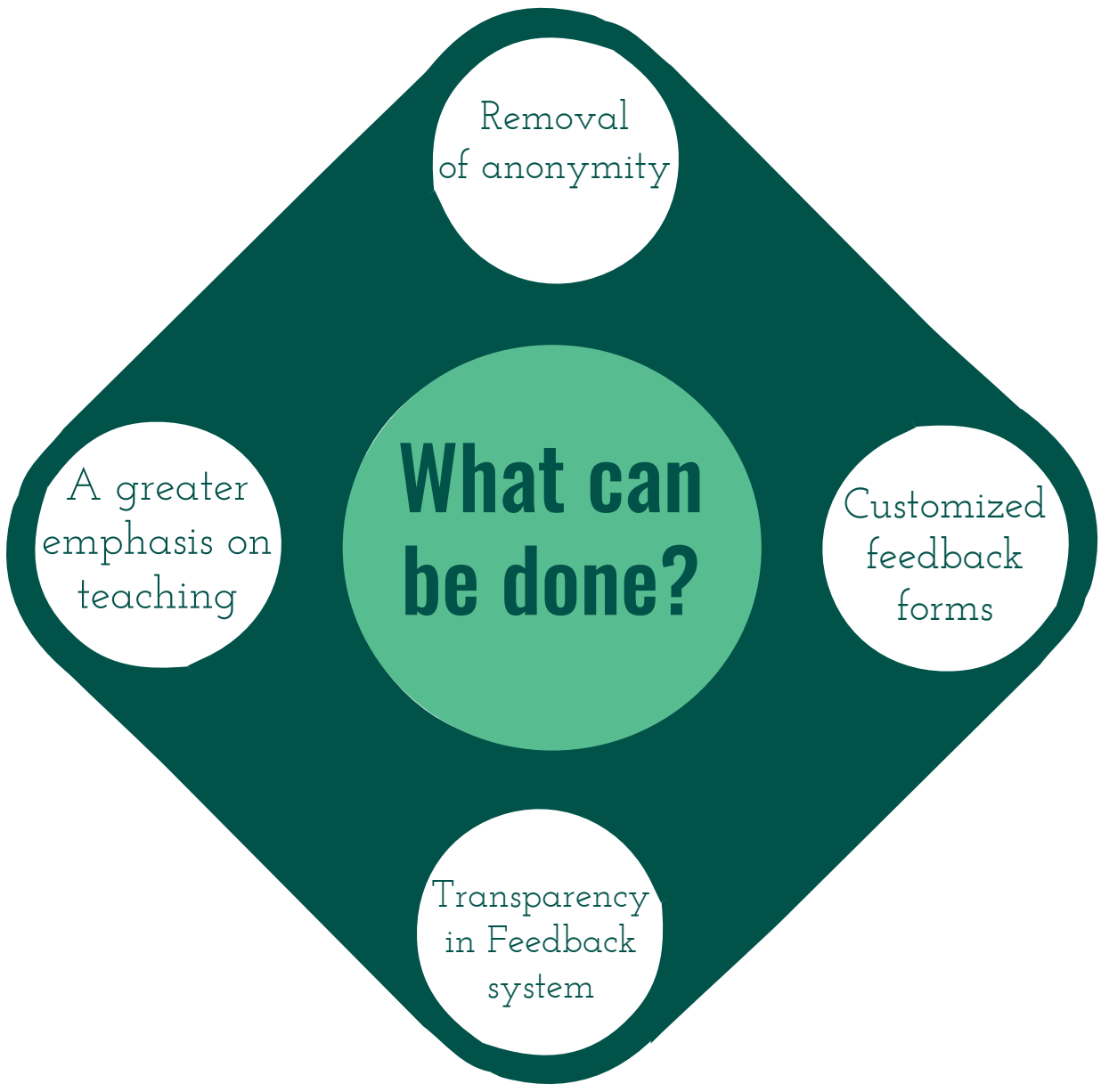
The very first step to improving the efficacy of this system is to make students realise what the feedback system desires from them. Students are poor at assessing their own learning in the short term, and this reflects in the feedback.

Secondly, anonymity for students ensures that professors cannot be vindictive to students that provide negative feedback, or biased towards students that give positive reviews. Yet, it also reduces the efficacy of the feedback itself, removing accountability from the student. The "online disinhibition effect" enables disingenuousness. Given that feedbacks are revealed to the faculty only after the final grades have been submitted and locked, a case is made for removal of anonymity. While controversial and may evoke a strong response from students, it does increase the likelihood of serious and constructive feedback being submitted. This can simultaneously be accompanied by making feedback voluntary.

Third, a greater emphasis on teaching is necessary. This requires efforts both from professors and students, who must each try to improve the classroom environment. This requires a massive cultural shift in institutes of higher learning where undergraduate teaching plays second fiddle to everything else. To paraphrase Nietzsche, teaching becomes an affair of the rabble. While this is a separate debate and warrants an entire article on its own, perhaps the HRD's idea of divorcing research and teaching may not be such a bad one after all.

Fourth, feedback summaries can be compiled and made available online, possibly on the academicsl portal itself. This extra bit of effort would increase accountability and transparency as well as bring legitimacy to the system. Students wishing to opt for certain DE's and OC's could easily consult this database for details pertaining to specific courses and professors. Of course, it goes without saying that students would also have to contribute by actually writing comprehensive reviews for the benefit of fellow students.

While administering feedback, professors have the option to create customised forms. Better utilisation of this functionality could go a long way to improving the quality of feedback that a professor receives, by making the feedback questions more relevant to the course. An increased focus on the subjective component of the form which till now is underutilised would help students communicate their concerns more effectively as well.



The BLUFFINGTON Post

Estd 2017

A look at the things that *didn't* happen on campus...

300 GIRLS JOIN IITD To be housed in boys hostels

Due to the surge of female students this year, IITD has decided to accommodate the surplus girls in boys hostels and has resolved to discard archaic restrictions on the entry of girls into them. In keeping with the times, the administration felt that these restrictions were no longer required. They expressed unwavering confidence in the students and expect that no one would misuse this freedom or bring shame to the institute's reputation.

IIT Delhi receives 400 research proposals on cow products

IIT Delhi has received around 400 research proposals to investigate the benefits of cow products such as cow urine, cow dung and cow sweat. The AYUSH ministry has shown interest in demonstrating the application of these products to a variety of medicinal, household and nutritional uses, and is encouraging IITs to conduct research to validate these claims. It has constituted a guidance committee to this end, to validate these scientific claims.

5 Years and $2 mn on, DST questions inconclusive results

The Centre for Health and Hygiene Issues (CHHI) received a memorandum questioning the absence of concrete conclusions from their epidemiological investigation into epidemic-examination correlations. The ambitious international collaboration, involving the CDC Atlanta, sought to decipher the lingering mystery regarding the repeated occurrence of acute health crises and the influx of students into the IITD hospital, during examinations.

SAC feels that LAN ban prevents spreading of GOT spoilers

In the SAC meeting conducted on the 20th of September 2016, the issue of LAN availability at night was raised. The student representatives in a surprising volte face talked about the importance of the LAN ban in preventing the spread of GOT spoilers on Monday mornings.This left the faculty representatives confused, but they happily accepted this rationale to maintain the status quo.

IITD Scientists discover Quantum phenomenon on macroscopic levels

The physics department's investigations into how students reach class at 8AM even after waking up at 7:55 have attributed this remarkable feat, hitherto inexplicable within the realm of classical mechanics, to a novel manifestation of quantum teleportation.

MESS TENDER RENEWAL

The firm awarded the tender should make the food quality as low as possible to reduce the material cost. Should keep hygiene as a priority lower than profit. Techniques to reuse leftover rice from previous meals would be highly advantageous. Send a sample of a roti with your application. Also, firms which have a track record of being kicked out from other DU or JNU colleges would be given preferences.

CLASSIFIED

CANNED LHC AIR

Can't sleep? Use this air to sleep instantly. Takes time to work on freshers. Most effective during minor time

PROXY FOR HIRE

Hired students go in your place to mark fake attendance or proxies - 100 rupees month for 1hr lectures and 120 for 1.5 hr lectures

TIMBLER

New Software that allows you to mark Timble attendance from anywhere. Now mark your CVL attendance from the comfort of your bed!

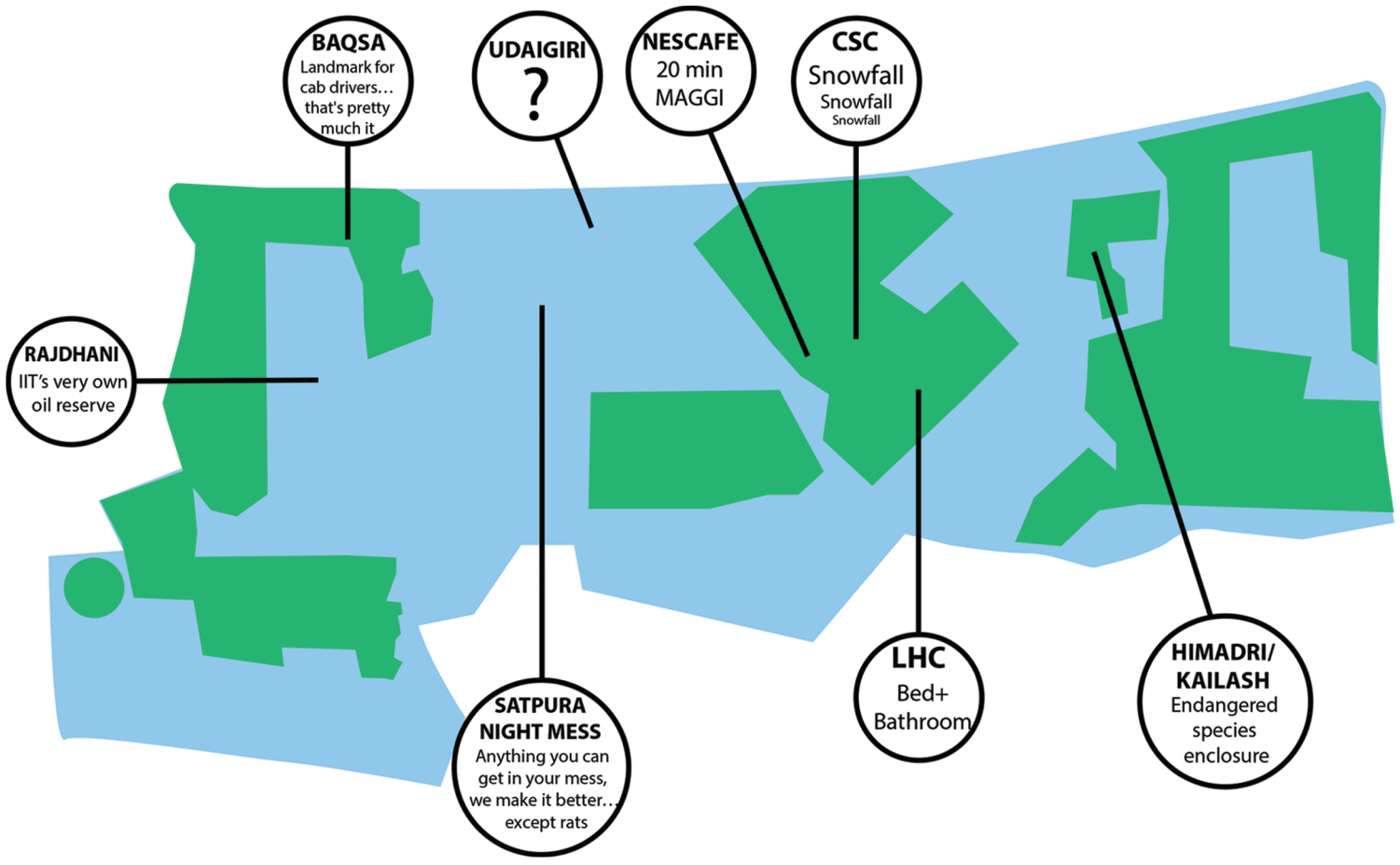
Anti-MOSS

The software that will render Moss ineffective on your homework, so no worries even if you copied your roommate's assignment while he was asleep.

PROXY FOR SALE

Squished your proxy? Look no further... We give you username and password for login, base price 500 for 5 GB and then 150 per GB

IIT-D ACCORDING TO IITIANS



DISCLAIMER: This page, all articles and incidents mentioned are a work of fiction

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Stories aren't born in a void. They evolve, from nascent ideas into finished pieces, through conversations and accounts of experiences and opinions. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the deans and professors—Prof. Anurag Sharma, Prof. Ambuj Sagar, Prof. B. Kundu, Prof. Debanjan Bhowmik, Prof. Deepti Gupta, Prof. Kushal Sen, Prof. Nalin Pant, Prof. Sanjeev Sanghi, Prof. Sandeep Sen, Prof. Shouri Chatterjee, the Chairman (JEE Advanced) IIT Delhi, members of the administration and the Hospital Advisory Committee, who specially put aside time to address our queries and give us data, and the students who, out of sheer interest, became a part of this creation and played an indispensable role in guiding the course of this process.

Journalists :
Anuja, Anukriti yadav, Arundhati Dixit, Riya Singh, Shreya Johri
Anmol, Malay Jain, Nitin Shekhar OK Varun, Rajas Bansal,
Rishabh Kumar, Ritwik Chakravarti, Sai rohan Salil Chandra,
Sanyam Chhangani, Sumakesh Mishra,
Swapnesh Agrawal Vaibhav Verma,
Yash Sheth

Designers :
Animesh Singh, Chaitanya Sharma, Devansh Jindal
Himanshu Garg, Parth Agarwal

Editor in Chief (Content) : Dhananjay Gupta, Nayantara Mudur
Editor in Chief (Design) : Kanika Jolly, Shashwat Singh

Special Thanks to :
Sanjana Garg, Aditi Jha, Ravi Prakash
Shankhabatra Nag
President : Prof. Simona Sawhney