
CARMA
APNA TIME AAYEGA

CONTENT

ALUMNI ACCOUNTS

NISSI MARY

The Biology major who graduated in 2018, is currently pursuing her PhD from the University of Connecticut.

"I talked to people who were already students there about the opportunities and funding options before finalizing my decision of applying... I did a detailed background check"

How did you apply to the University of Connecticut?

Every college has its own application procedures and deadlines. It has its own requirements such as the GRE and TOEFL score cutoffs, which if met, you would be able to apply for a PhD programme to the university of your choice.

Why did you apply to this University?

I kept this in mind while applying to UConn. Since I was applying to the Department of Neurobiology, I talked to people who were already students there about the opportunities and funding options before finalizing my decision of applying there. Doing PhD is one thing, keeping a normal work - personal life balance is another. I give sufficient importance on the latter too. Hence, I did a detailed background check on the department before applying and I was not disappointed.

So, if you plan on doing your PhD abroad, here are some pointers you should keep in mind:
The first thing you need to focus on is your advisor or principal investigator who will be your mentor for the next five years. You must try to maintain a good rapport with him/her. Secondly, look up the department of the university that you plan on pursuing your PhD in, whether they have the necessary facilities for your project and have enough funding to accommodate you.

What are the exams that you gave for PhD?

I gave the standard GRE and TOEFL exam before applying, because every university in the US requires these two exams to check your proficiency in English. Some Universities also accept certificates stating that your medium of communication was english in college, together with your name on any of

your published work in English. These are rare but nevertheless possible for PhD admissions also. Some universities prefer a decent subject GRE score, but this isnt a requirement in most universities with respect to the field of Biology.

During PhD, what all details have to be kept in mind?

During your PhD, if you do your work in an efficient manner, everything else will just fall into place. If you are faced with challenges (like every other student) don't give up hope, things always work out in the end. :)

And also, enjoy your weekends!

Are there any internships that you have worked on?

I interned at ACTREC, CBS and RGCB. I worked on mammalian and bacterial cells. These were just to get a hands-on- experience on the various techniques used in lab. In my fifth year, I worked on developing a pathway for actin formation in the Nueromuscular junction synapse in Drosophila.

I wasn't sure what I wanted to do till my fourth year and I vacillated between my decisions. First I wanted to go into Cancer Biology and then to epigentics and finally I settled on Neurogenetics and have since then, never looked back.

ARCHIT DEVARAJAN

INTERNING ABROAD

MD ISHAQUE KHAN

An iPhD student in IISER Bhopal, he is pursuing a major in Physcis.

"...interning at a top-ranking university with a not-so-good department rank is not a great value addition to your skillset, vice-versa is a better option."

How did you find the research facilities and ambience while doing your internship abroad? How was it different from India and in particular IISERB?

My internship was at University of Wisconsin – Madison. Being a student of theoretical physics, I was not exposed to laboratories and other instrumentation facilities. However, I interacted other with research scholars who mentioned that some of the research

facilities available here were still not readily accessible in India. This is one aspect where I found the States to be much better than India, especially in terms of research facilities. The topic that I chose to work on was 'Phenomenology of blue tilted isocurvature perturbations' which involved a lot of reading and understanding of concepts. I had an office to myself where could work day and night without being disturbed. The ambience there was pretty much like India, the only difference being that I found the people there to be more competitive.

What was your priority while selecting the university/laboratory you wanted to intern at?

My priority was to get the best university I possibly could with whatever I had to offer them. I started shortlisting universities based on their ranks, which is one of the most standard things that one could do. However, along with the university ranks, the rank of the department that you want to intern at should also be good. According to me, interning at a top-ranking university with a not-so-good department rank is not a great value addition to your skillset, vice versa is a better option.

What role does your project supervisor play during an internship?

Your supervisor makes a huge difference to your internship. He assists you in the teaching-learning

process and leads you on the right path to reach the final objective of your internship. Even if you are not looking for internships, you can write to the professor to get your doubts clarified on the topics which fall within his area of research. This in the long run will help you when you want an internship because the professor would assume that a person who has been writing to him would be really interested in what he is doing. The email you write to your professor should also be tailored is such a way that the professor finds you interested in his field of research. For example, it can include excerpts from his research papers or publications which helps you establish a common ground with the professor. It should make him feel that if you intern under him, it will be mutually beneficial.

Could you guide us on funding opportunities for international internships?

Funding opportunities are scarce, especially for theoretical subjects. This is evident from the disparity between the two scholarship programmes in India. For example, the S. N. Bose scholars programme for all non-biological streams) awards only $2000 as stipend to all the students who are selected, whereas the Khorana scholars programme (only for biological streams) awards a stipend of $2500 to selected students. Also, if it is an experimental subject, biological or non-biological, you will find a lot of funding opportunities. So,

one day, I asked my supervisor, "If I come back here for grad school, what is the funding like?" He said that, the funding majorly depends on your Teaching Assistantship. He also added that 'the funding for theoretical physics is almost one hundredth of what other experimental sciences get', which is not a very positive scenario. Also, if you go to an expensive city like Boston, the funding that your scholars programme gives you might be insufficient. If this happens, you could try asking the professor you are interning with for additional funds and may get some if lucky. However, the lack of funds should not deter you from following your passion.

How did the courses at IISERB aid you during your internship?

Whatever I know as on date, all the credit goes to IISERB and the professors here who have always been very supportive. The courses here laid the foundation for understanding concepts which require critical thinking skills. When you apply for internships, you have to apply to a specific field in which you need to know the specifics of the particular topic that you choose. For example, during my internship, I was working with a person who had completed his masters from the University of Edinburgh. So, he had done five courses on Quantum Field Theory, whereas I had done only one course on the same. IISERB offers only two courses on Quantum Field Theory which creates an incon-

gruity in terms of knowledge. However, there are ways to avoid this. What you can do is read about the topic and ask your doubts to the respective professor in IISERB. I still personally feel that there should have been more courses on the topic that students really want to study or courses on those topics which students would like to take up as research projects.

How did you benefit from this internship?

I had never travelled out of India. So, I was overjoyed to get an internship in a foreign land, a place I have never been to before. I got my passport and visa done only for this reason. Academically, it made me realize how much more I need to do in terms of reading and updating my knowledge. I also realized that being self-reliant and self-sufficient is important so that you do not have to depend upon professors and other seniors to help you out with small issues in every topic that you study. What is happening is that here we have a homely environment where we have people to talk to, we can approach professors, but, on foreign land, we can only approach our mentor for help. There are non-academic benefits associated with it too. For example, when you intern abroad, you get a glimpse of their culture and their way of life, which might be totally different from ours!!

Anything else that you would like to add about doing internships abroad?

I know this is hard to digest but there is a considerable difference in the standard of education in India and in the US. However, we cannot complain that the courses that we had in our institute were insufficient. Our teachers teach us the basics of the particular topic/subject and expect us to work further to improve our understanding of that topic. So, the onus is completely on us, whether we want to do it or not. I believe that internships in theoretical subjects test your knowledge and the ones involving practical work test your knowledge as well as application which is really important in today's increasingly competitive world. This is the reason why the government is funding you, to realize these differences and hence to imbibe all the good qualities that should help one improve one's potential as a researcher, because you have a responsibility as a student who's representing his/her country in a certain way. I would also like to mention that the prejudice I had about Americans not being that favourably disposed towards Indians was completely shattered for good and I found them to be extremely amiable and magnanimous.

My advice to all those of you who get a chance to intern abroad, DON'T MISS IT!!!

ALUMNI ACCOUNTS

BRAHADEESH S

An IISERb Alumnus, he is now pursuing a postgraduate course in IIT Bombay, for Mathematics.

"I never hesitated to take part in an activity just because there is some quiz coming up, but I never neglected my studies as well."

Were you clear about your career goals when you first came to IISER and were you aware of all the opportunities during the final years?

When I came to IISERB I came with the clear idea that I wanted to go into mathematics. I was quite sure that I am not interested in doing anything applied. During my BS-MS, the main confusion I was trying to clear was whether I wanted to go into research or teach-

ing. I was aware that there are quite a few opportunities after graduation. I knew the standard way: get a PhD, then go on to do a postdoc and basically enter into academia.

I knew about the companies like Mu Sigma that hire fresh graduates and also the alternative fields like statistics in which one can go after BS-MS from IISER. I also got an interesting opportunity during my final year to go into teaching. Khan Academy was hiring in India for their teaching positions and their selection process involved a talent search competition. I participated in that, and had an interview with the company. Although I didn't make the final cut, it was a stimulating experience and motivated me to seriously consider taking up teaching as a career path.

How was your experience as a JRF and what helped you decide on you career path?

Although it wasn't a JRF position, I did a project under Dr. Kumar Balasubramanian for around 6 months during the gap between my graduation and PhD and that was crucial in helping me decide whether I wanted to go into research or not. Mainly, it helped me gauge where I stand with my background and knowledge of the subject. In the end I decided that even if I wish to enter into teaching I should first strengthen my background in mathematics and so I should go for a PhD and

that teaching should probably come later.

You have a stellar academic profile so why didn't you immediately apply for PhDs abroad after graduating?

There is no one solid reason why I didn't apply abroad, but rather several smaller reasons. One thing is that I was not really certain that I am cut out for research and that I will want to continue in this line. So, going abroad and then feeling that its not working out for me, and coming back with a lot of time, money and effort wasted didn't sound very nice.

Another reason is that I was not sceptical about the idea of going abroad for the main aim of boosting my career prospects. I was not so sure that the dividends would be in proportion to what one would have to put in from one's own pocket. Yet another reason was that I was planning on getting married (and did so in January this year) to my long time partner, and it did not make sense to me to spend another half a decade potentially away from each other.

What are your opinions now about going for a PhD abroad and how should one select an institute/university for his/her PhD?

After coming to IIT Bombay I think it is quite possible that if you go abroad you may get a stronger background and atmosphere for research. It's not

necessary that you have to go out to do great, but there is an evident difference between institutes in what they have to offer a research scholar, something that I was sceptical about earlier. Not only are the capabilities of individual faculty members in the department important, but also the way the department functions as a whole should be an important criterion.

Of course, when it comes to selecting a university the mere fact of it being located abroad does not mean it is good for you. To assess a university or department you will need to research about them and the faculty there under whom you could be working with. Having contacts there in the form of alumni or others who can provide trustworthy counsel would be crucial in this regard.

How would you compare the all round atmosphere at IISERB and IITB?

The foremost difference is in the level of activity in the campus. There are a lot of conferences, public lectures, invited talks and those sorts of things happening frequently here in IIT Bombay. In fact there is at least one guest speaker and/or public lecture every week, and more departmental seminars being run than I can possibly attend. Such level of activity is not present at IISERB, but it can be somewhat expected as not only is IISERB fairly new and still gathering ground, but the the sheer

size of IITB in terms of the number of people and departments is far greater.

The student life is also equally different. There are so many diverse activities on campus that you will feel compelled to get involved in them.
One clear sense in which the IITB campus is more "happening" is that in IISERB one may not see such a large proportion of postgraduates participating in campus events with as much enthusiasm as in IITB.

You can probably say a lot on this but could you tell us in brief about your life at IISERB, what you gained from it and how you handled the hectic academic schedule?

One thing that I consciously did was engage myself in every kind of activity that I could, not only in terms of participation but also as in volunteering and organising. I was actively involved in Singularity. I also took up certain leadership positions as a member of the SAC and tried to bring about certain changes that I thought were necessary. As the vice secretary of Cultural Council I helped in organising Virasat.

When it comes to participation I tried my best in whichever way I was competent enough. I never looked at my life as it being divided into boxes like academic life, social life or personal life.

I tried to put myself in every position that was available to me and what drove me was the realisation that I need to gather certain experiences and open up myself and learn to live outside my comfort zone. I never hesitated to take part in an activity just because there is some quiz coming up, but I never neglected my studies as well.

I consider myself lucky as it all worked out quite well for me in the end. The one thing that I took away from all my experiences at IISERB is that most people are in the same boat as I am. So, I learnt how and when to trust my own judgement and to not be bothered by other people's opinions. This confidence that I gained from having clarity of vision has really helped me in my life in every way.

CONFAB

ZEFYR PLAY

Keshav Hibare, Rameez Qureshi and Akshay Date talk about their new start-up, Zefyr Play

"we define start-up as earning money while pursuing your passion. In simple words, it's earning while enjoying"

Q1. How long has it been since you had the idea of this startup?

RAMEEZ: We were contemplating on the idea to set up a start-up for a long time. In our 4th year, we began to explore and consider our idea more rigorously. In 2017, we decided to materialize our idea and sent a proposal to the IICE (Institute's Innovation and Incubation Centre for Entrepre-

neurship) of IISER BHOPAL. Our proposal got accepted and we registered our company "Zefyr Play" in January 2018.

Q2) How has the incubation cell at IISER Bhopal helped you in setting up your start-up?

KESHAV: We were actually the first student start-up to be incubated by the Incubation Cell. Incubation cell basically provides resources and office space and in some cases, funds to developing start-ups.

The incubation cell also provides a mentor for the start-up. Initially,since start-up companies are novices in the business arena, they serve as the key link in connecting the start-ups to the business world. In this regard, indeed it was the Incubation cell that actually helped us to materialize our idea into an actually functioning start-up. They provided us the basic essentials and resources and the office space to set up our start-up.

Q3) What prompted you to choose this career path hen the general norm is to pursue academia after graduation?

RAMEEZ: We realized our options aren't just saturated to academia. We also realized our passion was pursuing our idea of a start-up. Moreover, we define start-up as earning money while pur-

suing your passion. In simple words, it's "earning while enjoying".

AKSHAY: It was initially startling how Gaming, even though is a huge industry worldwide, receives no major incentive in India and is infact, frowned upon. Thus, one of our long-term goals is to expel all forms of misconceptions about gaming. Armageddon, our launching deck, was like a test-run for us. Infact, We developed our marketing skills while marketing the merchandise for Armageddon.

We enjoyed organizing Armageddon as much as seeing the unfaltering enthusiasm of the participants. Infact, the satisfaction we got from seeing people satisfied was our primary driving force. In short, Armageddon was where we derived the impetus and the confidence to set up our start-up. Our main motive for setting up the start-up is minimal work from our user's side.

One of our goals is to automate the whole process of user log in, play and attainment of the rewards. The whole motive of "less work for players" was derived from our experience at organizing Armageddon. People enjoy more when the process is hassle-free.

Q4) How has the culture,the courses and your peer group at IISER-B been crucial in setting up the start-up?

KESHAV: While at IISER-B, we assure you that your

perspective and your skills will undergo rigorous transformations. Armageddon was actually our stepping stone to setting up this start-up. It was this offline event, which prompted us to create an online platform. The response and enthusiasm of the gamers encouraged us to pursue our idea further. Moreover, your interactions with people from varied backgrounds will help you build contacts both inside and outside your college. The thought process and approach to solving problems are crucial. The unique coursework at IISER-B is guaranteed to mould and develop your problem solving ability.

RAMEEZ: Academically, my 5th year thesis on "Game Theory", was quite interesting and helped develop my decision making skills. So when solving a problem, our brain would already be trained to think of ways to approach it and the variables involvedAlso, majoring in math was a huge confidence booster. It actually gives you confidence while posing an argument. (On a side note, never get into an argument with a mathematician) So in a way, the problem solving ability which we inculcated from IISER-B shall prove fruitful in the long run and we believe the unique experience and exposure you get here will not be found elsewhere.

Q5) What are the obstacles you faced initially while setting up your start-up?

AKSHAY: The first was mental preparation.
Then, mixed opinions regarding the idea from professors, friends and family. We started thinking of the idea rigorously from fourth year, so in our fifth year we were trying to maintain a delicate balance between the start-up , our academics and the fest Armageddon.

RAMEEZ: Start-ups are undeniably risky. You are investing your time and money into something whose outcome you cannot predict. Starting a start-up early off in one's career has its downside too. A short blow is all that is required to give you he delusion of being permanently thrown off your career path. Registration and tax filing and lack of proper knowledge about these legal formalities had emerged as a problem too, but luckily the IICE eased the whole process. We had no heads up. There was no prior path for us to follow- be it rose or rock laden. We had to make our own path and that was difficult. Nonetheless, circumventing these obstacles and finally setting up the start-up was like telling the world boldly that this is where our passion lies.

Q6) In addition to the general coursework, do you think the students need to equip themselves up with some extra skill sets?

KESHAV: Indeed, any discipline you take, basic programming skills become essential. Logical thinking is one of the faithful outcomes of learn-

ing coding. You can train your brain to approach research problems logically and this is equally important even if you are looking for a career in academia and not in the industry. If you are looking for jobs in the corporate world or even research jobs in the industry, your programming skills can help you earn an extra edge over other aspirants. Owing to the popularity of Data Analysis and Machine Learning, we have some really good and varied courses in the Engineering Science Department that students can take up. In addition to that, never lose an opportunity to improve upon your communication skills. Interact with more people and build your networks, it'll definitely come in handy.

Q7) What do you think are the similarities and differences between pursuing a career in academia and the corporate world?

AKSHAY: Sometimes, in the corporate world you lack liberty but in research you may get a chance to pursue your specific field of interest in a more unrestricted way. The time taken to reach your desired outcome varies in both the cases. Academia and start-ups are more or less similar whereas corporate world is a different category. While setting up a start-up, you are on your own, you are responsible for where you are.

RAMEEZ: In our opinion, the path to start-ups is not quite different from the path to research. In

both the cases, you are basically solving a problem. The only difference is that you get stability after solving the problem in research and in the case of start-up , you earn profits.

Q8) What would you like to tell students who wish to pursue this career path?

KESHAV: Never be afraid to pursue something which is not mainstream, if you are passionate about it-you have got to risk it. More importantly, never be afraid to pursue something you love,something you are passionate about, irrespective of what other people think. A career in Academia isn't foolproof either, you need to work hard to be self-established.

RAMEEZ: One of the model's we formulated for our online platform was to facilitate players to compete with themselves thereby helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses. The hidden agenda and the message we'd like to give here is-start competing with yourself, fight the battles within before you turn to the world outside.

AKSHAY: Lastly, Academics is highly important but take some time out to do some extra-curriculars. Extra curriculars may not earn you a bonus academically but they'll definitely earn you a bonus in Life 101.

MANAVIKA KHANNA

SCHOLAR OPPORTUNITIES

The young India Fellowship is truly an opportunity to broaden one's horizons.

The CDC hosted a session on the Young India Fellowship(YIF) on 24 October 2018. The Young India Fellowship, is a one-year residential multi-disciplinary post graduate diploma program at the Ashoka University with a focus on experimental learning.

The YIF was launched in 2011 by the International Foundation for Research and Education (IFRE), a not- for-profit company. Since 2014, YIF became the flagship program of the Ashoka University and offers a Post-Graduate Diploma in Liberal Studies

&Leadership to its fellows after graduation. Students also have the option to convert this diploma into a research-based master's degree called a Master in Liberal Studies by spending another year on campus. Indians often take up their respective specializations quite early in life. The current education system makes the youth particularize their field of study and thereby they decide their career path before they hit the age of 25. Oft times a student doesn't get the opportunity to dwell on his own preferences and aspirations in the constant marathon of life.

The YIF gives a chance to discover your passions and interests even after cementing your path to the professional life. A number of you might be interested to pursue future opportunities which may not necessarily be of a traditional academic nature alone. The multi-disciplinary aspect of the diploma ensures to develop and diversify an individual's skill set. The YIF consists of an Experiential

"The multi-disciplinary aspect of the diploma ensures to develop and diversify an individual's skill set."

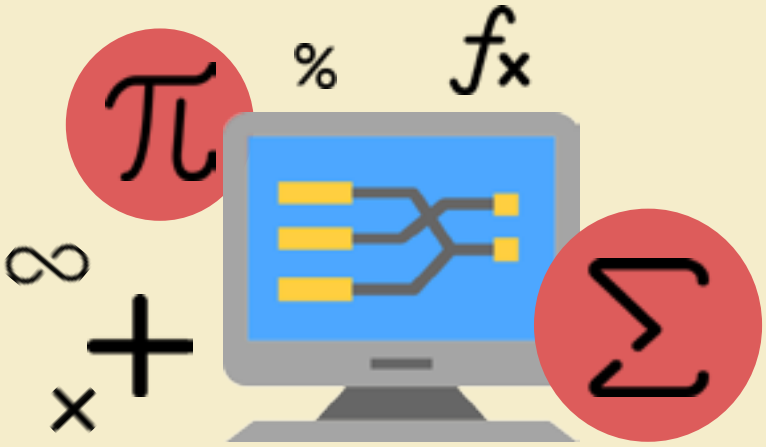
Learning Module where fellows work on real-life projects and start-ups. It is a core component of the entire program. It also offers a compulsory

Critical Writing Program thereby helping fellows prepare for various entrances like Civil Services as well.
The YIF also promotes an active exchange program with some of the finest universities in the world such as Oxford and Cambridge to name a few. This maintains a sense of inclusivity and tolerance amongst peers thereby promoting the true colors of diversity and shaping them into global citizens. This 8 year old program is focused on working on an individual's uniqueness and equipping them with the skills necessary for the modern world.

To be eligible for the course one must be less than 28 years of age and should be a holder of a recognized undergraduate or post-graduate degree. One must also possess skills in extra-curricular activities. A merit scholarship worth 50,000 INR is awarded to every student enrolled in the course. On the basis of performance in the screening tests, one can get a full scholarship of 9 Lacs. The application portal opens in late October-early November.

We believe this is a highly attractive and challenging course module which may be of great use to a number of you.

CAREER TREATS

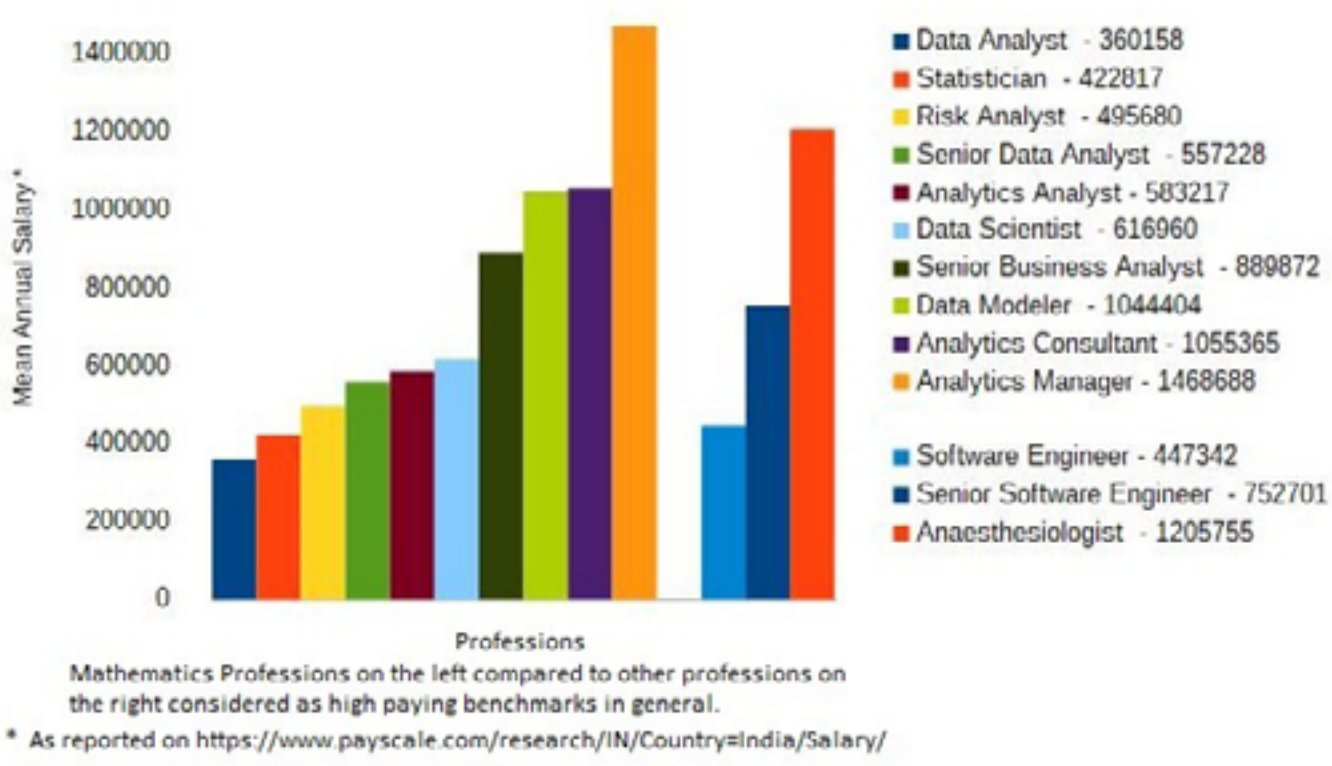


FOR MATH PEEPS

A faculty works in Academics for around 30 years. With just an elementary knowledge of Maths, we can tell considering the data that student – faculty ratio is much larger than the ratio of the period spent as faculty to that as a student. So there are many more potential job seekers than jobs available in Academics. So Faculty positions are not adequate to provide jobs for all graduates. Mathematics is no exception to this phenomenon. However, there are a plethora of job opportunities open to Mathemat-

ics students which everyone overlooks for a few reasons and thus Mathematics is left with the notion of being inadequate in Career Opportunities. One reason is that Mathematics graduates don't look forward to Applied Mathematics jobs which offers most jobs in Mathematics. Another is that every other job which is interdisciplinary is seen as a job of disciplines other than Mathematics.

Mathematics has a wide avenue of research interests associated with it. All of these are highly distinct. With no particular preference, Protein Structure Comparison can be consdiered to appreciate the involvement of mathematics in all fields of research. Protein Structure Comparison is essential to help determine Protein functions from structures and vice versa. Currently Protein Structure Alignment is done by human annotation. This makes it not only very laborious and cumbersome but also lags far behind the required pace especially with the ever increasing amounts of Protein Structure Information available. The computational methods of protein structure comparison developed so far use root mean square deviation among other methods. Most of them fall short as they do not compare proper distances. Current structural alignment algorithms as DALI, CE, VAST and SSAP are computationally intensive and time consuming especially when searching large databases due to intrinsic complexity of structural alignment.



Mathematics Professions on the left compared to other professions on the right considered as high paying benchmarks in general.

* As reported on https://www.payscale.com/research/IN/Country=India/Salary/

Research in Pure and Applied Mathematics goes hand in hand. On one hand, Pure Mathematics is inapplicable directly in the Real World but on the other, research and expertise in Pure Mathematics yields methods and experts respectively, to function in the Real World via Applied Mathematics. Data such as Customer Feedback and KPIs (Key Perfromance Indicators) are integral to business survival.

"Mathematics has no restraints of applicability and is constant everywhere; it is a pure science. Consequently, it has applications everywhere."

Rapid increase in amounts of data, however would make it impossible to act on these inputs. Using Statistical Processes such as Regression and Multivariate Analysis, this data can be filtered and analysed to give comprehensible output. This requires developing a model. Every large organisation offers multiple portfolios of Analysts and Statisticians to graduates in Statistics and Mathematics. Even larger organisations offer portfolios such as Director Analytics and Senior Analyst for converitng this modeling output into actionable business insights which can give scalable outputs. Interdisciplinary jobs of Computer Science and Mathematics are increasingly appearing these days. 3D Math Skills such as Linear Algebra and Vector Math tooled with C/C++ knowlege are used by Rendering Engineers in Walt Disney to render film quality imagery in real time.

Knowledge of Machine Learning is required for Computer Vision (algorithms for electronic devices to make sense of live images and identify objects). Machine Learning is a part of Artificial Inteligence. AI builds upon Mathematical tools of Linear Algebra, Probability, Multivariate Calculus and Optimization. AIs today can perform speech recognition, solve complex equations, drive a car by itself, recognise faces and much more. In future, however, AIs are expected to eradicate war, poverty, disease and many other major problems of today.

Mathematics has no restraints of applicability and is constant everywhere; it is a pure science. Consequently, it has applications everywhere. Also due to its purity, it is not seen anywhere in the real world and has no direct applications. So while purity once
restricted Mathematics in the jobs it had to offer, today, with advancement in all fields, it has opened up jobs for Mathematics in a vast variety of arenas.

THE INDIVIDUAL

And The System

The individual's relation to the system, and how this varies across cultures is an intriguing topic to analyze. To make matters concrete, let us concentrate on contrasting the broad features of this relationship as found in India and in the United States of America. Each of them is a large, multi-dimensional and diverse country, so the caveat that all rules would be subject to exceptions is invoked right at the outset. Moreover, in an age when the world is to be regarded as a global village and when something of the whole world is to be found everywhere, a con-

trasting study of culture from a geographical standpoint may well be met with skepticism. However, certain broad generalizations are indeed possible and they throw light on an array of topics from individualism, meritocracy, excellence, mediocrity etc.

One of the key features of a purely capitalistic system (like in the USA) is the rewarding of merit. In such a system, underperformance is a cardinal sin. If meritorious, the rise is meteoric, but alas mediocrity can lead to heavy punishment. So in such a system, the extraordinary flourish, while the average or the mediocre tend to have a tough time. The flip side with this system though is that the definition of what constitutes merit is often directly linked with something crudely materialistic. Performance is often measured in terms of a blind `more is better' philosophy with greed as an inevitable underlying driving force. The ugly side of capitalism is that it can sometimes take the meaning out of the activity. For instance the mindless churning out of academic articles with the sole aim being an overabundance of numbers is surely rooted in the capitalistic production model of the US.

On the other hand in a country like ours, a person of average or even mediocre capability often goes unpunished, just like a person of extraordinary talents goes unrewarded. A buffering mechanism of some kind tends to average out the whole and eschews extreme success or extreme failure. We also

have cases where mediocrity is not only unpunished, but may even be rewarded if the art of pleasing the right people is mastered. Despite all the lethargy and despite the bizarre methods used for evaluation and the innumerable constraints, our system does have many extraordinary individuals who perform against odds.

The system in the US too comes with its share of negatives. It tends to favor a select few, ultra-motivated individuals who make it big, and can be ruthless against even the next level who are good but not extraordinary. For example the tenure track system with all its cut-throat emphasis on keeping only the best, many a time, ends up promoting quantity over quality and often kills talent that cannot measure up to the narrow definition of excellence extolled by it.

To understand the contrast between these two systems better, we can look at how they treat the individual during the crucial transition from child to adult. The differences are apparent from a young age itself. In a collective system like ours, parents tend to make many choices for their children. A number of constraints are automatic, and growing up and going to college here is often a time for an individual to question and decide on what constraints to keep and what to break. The western system, it appears puts rather minimal constraints on the individual. Choice is plenty even from a young age, and is perhaps of-

ten the cause for ruin. Some individuals learn the art of making the right choices, and such individuals tend to excel in the long run. Also exercising choices gives consequences and these consequences must be dealt with. Even if some mistakes are committed in the process, it is also to be thought of as a trial-and-error method of learning. The flip side though is that a kid faced with too many options and choices, is simply a mass of confusion, performing a random walk through life. This is where an Indian system of providing a buffer zone and direction is beneficial for a large section of the society. Since a very strict check is kept by parents on their children, it is extremely hard to take decisions which can potentially alter their life's course during their early years. The average person is probably well-off having these hooks of constraint.

"humility and self-confidence can go perfectly well together and it is often insecurity and fear that create a false coat of modesty"

In our country we also suffer from a lack of self-confidence. We wear a mask of subservience and pretend that it is a form of humility. In reality humility and self-confidence can go perfectly well together and it is often insecurity and fear that create a false coat of modesty. We have a system

where nobody likes to take responsibility and rather would like to hide behind committees which do everything possible to do nothing. Perhaps our low self-esteem may be attributed to a history invasions which systematically attacked at our self-belief. We still suffer from a complex where foreign services and goods are automatically viewed as superior to our own. This defeatist attitude pulls us further into a pool of mediocrity. The willingness to take risks, a quality associated with capitalism, is what actually leads to high success (and more often than not, failure too).

"We still suffer from a complex where foreign services and goods are automatically viewed as superior to our own."

"OVEREMPHASIS ON SECURITY LEADS TO MEDIOCRITY".

It is not the objective of this article to say one system is better or worse. Rather it is an attempt to observe how things work in the two systems and to sketch some of their features. Each comes with its merits and demerits which suit/support a particular demographic of the population somewhat more

than others. We live at a time when every individual is bound to feel the influence of every system in the world, directly or indirectly. So the modern-day skill constitutes of how to navigate through life and make a meaningful story out of it, regardless of the circumstances. Whatever system one is in, the aim should always be for the individual to rise above all constraints and facilitate the flowering of the full potential that is innate in every human being.

"A man of merit owes himself to the homage of the rest of mankind who recognize his worth."
-Jules Verne

This article is based on the ideas and opinions of Dr. Auditya Sharma.

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