ping!

A MONTHLY PING TO ALL IIITIANS !!

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Hello again, IIIT.

After a rather conspicuous period of absence, PING is back! In a new year, and with renewed vigor! Following our last issue in November, we've taken a good two months to piece together this fresh copy of PING. Admittedly, we — the PING team — were not all abuzz with activity during this time, and quite a lot has happened in the campus.

The winter break was a comfortable little breather for most of us, but there were some who were on their toes even during that time. Yes, it's the placement season, with companies still coming and hiring from the campus. Each day the smiles multiply, as more students get placed. Our institute holds a position of respect in the Industry, thanks to the alumni, who have been trailblazers wherever they go. In this spirit, Yahoo! R&D conducted HackU, an app design based hacking contest, putting us right up there among the select few places where they've held it so far. The event was a great success. The R&D showcase, too, saw good crowds from the industry and colleges alike.

In this issue of PING we've tried to cover all that has happened, but all eyes are riveted on what is still to come — it's Felicity 2K10. This year's Felicity promises to be bigger, better and more fun filled than ever before. Already the fever has set in, with frenzied preparations going on in all departments.

In our quest to improve PING, we've included a full fledged Alumni special this time, featuring the interview of Mr.Vipul Kedia of the 1999 batch. It also features some articles on IIIT then and now, and how Felicity has grown from its first incarnation to what it is today.
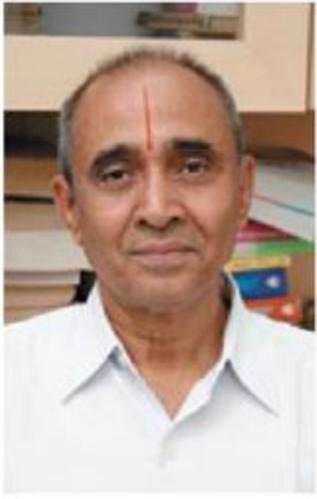
And as usual, we have an assortment of material to grab your interest, featuring blogs by some IIITians, an interview with a professor who is VERY popular among the students; he loves to label us with a host of catchy names — rascals, black sheep, ruffians and so on (no more hints needed, I suppose!), and a few odds and ends which together complete this month's PING.

It's really heartening to see the kind of support, readership and inputs PING has received all of you . As our new year resolution, we aim not just to live upto your expectations, but to outshine them. Here's to lots of issues and many more years of PING!

As ping! grows, the time comes near for the old members to pass on the baton to the new. PING welcomes its newest members from UG-1 and UG-2.

Happy PINGing!!

15th February' 2010

We enter CVEST, the last room being occupied by a man in his youth writing a mail. On the chair beside him sits another man, instructing the first one. This one seems old but age has still not worn him down. This is our man..

Initially he is reluctant to give an interview but finally he gives in to our persistent requests. He motions us to enter. After having pulled some potshots at a few fourth years who had volunteered to come along, there is no doubt left in our minds at the personal rapport he shares with the students and the reason for his being so famous across batches.

He says that this is why he thinks he is here. "I'm like any other teacher.. just an ordinary person striving for excellence. There are so many people out here who are more knowledgeable than me and are equally good if not better. The only thing where I'm above other people could be 'age'." Unpretentious and modest, we'd like to say.

"I suppose that this is what is the difference between students here and at REC Warangal where I was a faculty member - they were more disciplined. By disciplined, I mean those people did not have a complacent attitude.

Here, in IIIT, more freedom is being given with a good (if not noble) intention to the students. The freedom enriched with good intentions is being misused. I am surprised every time I find students sleepy at 9:30 in the morning! The Morning PT has been introduced with the intention that the students would get up early in the morning and would feel fresh in the classes. Till 90s the things were different; teachers were respected by and large in spite of the fact that students had to tolerate some limitations on the part of the faculty. But everything can't be perfect. Students are provided flexibility and freedom, but it doesn't mean that a student comes late to class and that too without any inclination to learn. For all this indiscipline, seniors are to be held responsible for they haven't groomed the juniors well enough."

Without much ado we shifted the topic to some familiar domain. "Sir what are your views on JV?" ..
After some thought and a long pause, "I don't know much about it, But it has been put on with a good in-tention only." Come on, sir, we know you are one of the few who speak out their mind. You are entitled to have an opinion and air it.

"A few years ago, when a discussion on research was going on, some of us were of the opinion that it could be made an extra curricular activity. Based on the positive feedback given by the people who attended it, I feel there might have been an interest in making it compulsory." Ahem.. Ahem.. "positive feedback" one needs to check this one out.. "I suppose it could be optional and some sort of freedom could be given for it too. I do not have anything else to share on this subject." Yeah !! we could not agree more, some things are best if left unsaid.

"Sir there is faculty shortage in ECE. How do you see it?"
"I think we are not able to attract the faculty. It is not like Computer Science is any better. In IIIT, though the stress is given equally, it might be that the focus is more on the software side, however, from the faculty side I am not sure. That ECE is neglected might be a general perception but I think it is wrong"

Well if the faculty is short why offer the course at the time of admission?
"Such things needs to be decided quite in advance as such I am not really into the administrative loop." We get the point , Sir.

Speaking of being in the loop what is your view on RSAO. We call it Response to Students Attendance Objection.

"I was against it when it was being proposed. If a student is good, he has to be present in the class, and make the discussion there more lively and interesting. I shall never give it." Those are some tough words. But sir, who would like to miss your classes when they are so lively...

"I mention in all my classes, every year, 'Challenge every faculty member in the class. We must be kept on our toes by the students. Today, we don't have to prepare much to teach because the students do not bother about the lectures nor do they ask any questions. There should be an attitude to get the best out of the interaction that happens in the class. That's what I wish to cultivate in my students. Being a student one must BE rather inquisitive and be bubbling with enthusiasm. You guys should 'pounce' on the faculty when it comes to the desire to learn.' It is only then I will say a class is lively."

You for one sir, are so disciplined.. He cuts us short

"Who said I am disciplined? Well, I haven't been disciplined all my life, even I had my days, like I used to bunk off 2nd year classes as the prof used to dictate notes. Also I used to take the service courses as a secondary one (as such also no attention being paid to such courses constitutes the latest trend). But yes, I never broke a night. Even now I can't. As a young fellow I used to sleep early only to wake up early, read, and then sleep again to wake up on time."

Ah!!! On breaking a night what are your views on the varied night passions of students and other 'stuff'?
"Once in a while it's all right, but more than that it is a diversion! I am not ok with it. Let me tell you many people follow late night passions. But when I see a young guy sitting on a bench late in the night doing nothing.. `isn't that a waste of time`? Even a liberal person won't allow it!!" Oh!! Yes, no one should allow that, we could not agree more..

But we are not 'sanyasis', sir.
"I agree that you teenagers are no sanyasis but this is a waste of time. I don't suggest anything like an iron curtain or something but things should not be done at the expense of academics."

Sir, who was your inspiration?
"I had an inferiority complex as I come from a rural background etc. but my teachers are my inspiration. I was scared of them but fear does help at times. I was also good at imitating them. One of my favorite professor was Prof. PRK Rao. He is an amazing teacher however, I had difficulty in understanding his lectures. But he teaches really well especially the history of science."

One hour had simply flown by. The time had come to leave.

Sir, your message to the students -
"You guys should treat us teachers like your parents, your foster fathers, your local guardians.. you must share your problems with your teacher. Learning and doing well in academics is important. So one must concentrate on the priorities, other things later. Have a nice time. But don't forget your primary purpose for coming here. A student must be dedicated, disciplined, hard-working, and most importantly, should have the urge to excel and have humility - the most important quality of a good student."
Jawaharlal Nehru in his letters to Indira Gandhi writes that humility is the greatest virtue possessed by all great men. We understood its true meaning after meeting him.

Yahoo! Hack-U

HackU is an event organized by Yahoo! every year across the globe in various colleges. This time the venue was IIIT -H. The word Hack itself has preconceived notions about messing up something already existing. This always generates excitement within everyone as to 'how does one get to do it?'

HackU was scheduled from 22nd -24th Jan and began with a talk given on the 22nd evening in room 119, Main Building. The room was overflowing with eager students from every batch. Such was the crowd that many at the back had to stand up on their chairs just to get the glimpse of the presentations and the presenters. The talk was specifically about what the event is and also to clear up doubts such as what a layman thinks to be a hacker, is actually a cracker. It described HackU as a rush event where teams have to think of an idea and develop its prototype version within 24 hours. The best hacks would win prizes. As an incentive, the Yahoo! crew distributed HackU t-shirts for any correct answers to the questions posed by them.

The main event was on 23rd Jan and was preceded by another talk in the morning where the Yahoo! crew spoke about their APIs which could be used by teams during the contest. After this was done, the clock struck 11 and the event began with a 24 hour countdown. Everyone started discussing their ideas with the Yahoo! crew who were very cooperative and helped everyone. In fact it was like they were searching for students to help! The fun had just begun and the workplaces stretched from computer labs to the hostel rooms. The 24 hour event saw every participant work throughout the night with such great enthusiasm that very few left for sleep. The labs were occupied throughout and supported by the Yahoo! crew. Special care was taken by the institute for this event and SysAdmins even allowed the hostelproxy to work within the labs. Snacks were also provided for the participants. The teams deserve a special mention for displaying untiring enthusiasm. They stuck their ground till the demo, working non-stop.

After the allotted 24 hours were up, demos were organized where each team presented their hacks to a panel of judges which included Prof. Vikram Pudi, Prof. Vasudeva Verma and the Yahoo! crew. The demos exhibited the creativity and amazing talent within the IIIT students. Some even went to the extent of creating a new Google Wave. Many were funny (a Hindi programming language translating 'printf' to 'chhapo', etc) but technically innovative, etc. After the demos, a break was given and the prizes were announced at 5 pm on 24th Jan. It began with the finalists. A list of top 12 teams and then the honorary hacks were announced. These hacks were presented with certificates, pronouncing every one of them as a "Yahoo! Ethical Hacker". And finally the winners,

the top four teams: *FunHack (Saurabh Sharma, Shantanu Shrivastava, Harshad Shrikhande - UG2k7), RATS (Hemant Dhingra, Nitin Jain - UG2k5, Rahul Namdev - UG2k7, Shubham Gautam - UG2k6), JustHoverIt (Manisha Verma, Prashant Sharma, Dipti Mathur, Amit Arora - PG) and Real Time Form Collaboration [by Sysadmins](Gaganpreet, Sanrag Sood - UG2k6, Kulbir Saini - UG2k5, Rishabh Mukherjee - UG2k4).* The prizes included portable DVD players with screens and Apple iPods. Special thanks was given by the Yahoo! team to the IIIT Crew who were also present throughout the night. According to the Yahoo! crew, the event was a huge success and they had a great time. The crew connected well with the students and one of them, Jeremy, even requested everyone to say "Hi" to his fiancée as he was getting married. We all wish him luck. The event signed off with the customary Yahoo! Wave by everyone in the room.

Computer Programming Assignments: Are we doing it right? -By AbhilashI

Assignments in the computer programming course play a crucial role by being major components of learning.

These assignments
1. give much needed practical experience in understanding fundamental programming constructs namely -- in the words of Edger Dijkstra -- 1) sequencing 2) repetition and 3) choice
2. shift the emphasis from mere syntax to the concepts of programming and applying them to solve problems
3. are uploaded on an online portal which gives immediate feedback to students' about the solution
4. unlike exams, students can work on these at their own pace and leisure and thus providing enough opportunity to reflect back on what they have done
5. encourage collaboration among students where one gets to learn from their mates problem solving approaches and mistakes
6. take major chunk of students' time. Time spent on assignments is more than the number of contact hours through classes, labs, tutorials all put together and this is justified due to all of the above cited reasons

While the learning that happens through assignments is clearly understood, the results are unwanted due to plagiarism. In the recent computer programming course offered in Spring 2009, not surprisingly, it was observed that most of the plagiarism happened during the hours just before the deadline. So three new models of computer programming assignments were introduced to reduce the plagiarism .They are described as follows:

Bounding Model: In this model we put a bound on the maximum number of students who can solve a particular problem. So we floated more number of problems than they actually need to solve. The exact details are as follows: there are 180 students in all, we floated 18 problems out of which students' had to solve 12 and the maximum allowed submissions per problem is 130.

What was observed a huge increase in the number of early submissions and no reduction in plagiarism as expected.

Furthermore, students found this setting to be adding unbearable burden.

Rewarding Model: Considering the student feedback, we came up with a rewarding model in which instead of bounding the number of submissions we rewarded students' who made early submissions. We gave an extra credit to top 10% submissions for all the problems with the condition that a student can submit atmost one question in 10 hours time.

This model strikes a balance by 1) encouraging early submissions and hence lesser last phase submissions 2) lessening the pressure to submit early. Since it was only 10% per problem the number of early submissions had been less compared to the earlier model.

Continuous Learning Model: Finally we came up with another setting in which one has to solve the assignment problems continuously-- one problem a day or two -- during the whole assignment duration. There should be a minimum gap of 5-8 between two submissions.

One has to fully study these models before commenting further on the merits and demerits of them. Personally, I feel that we should first strive to provide more guidance to novices who are expected to solve these problems in the same way as experts do. The following quotes from a study by Kirschner et. al summarize the issue of minimal guidance very well: (ref: Computing Education Blog)

There seem to be two main assumptions underlying instructional programs using minimal guidance. First they challenge students to solve "authentic" problems or acquire complex knowledge in information-rich settings based on the assumption that having learners construct their own solutions leads to the most effective learning experience. Second, they appear to assume that knowledge can best be acquired through experience based on the procedures of the discipline (i.e., seeing the pedagogic content of the learning experience as identical to the methods and processes or epistemology of the discipline being studied; Kirschner, 1992).

After a half-century of advocacy associated with instruction using minimal guidance, it appears that there is no body of research supporting the technique. In so far as there is any evidence from controlled studies, it almost uniformly supports direct, strong instructional guidance rather than constructivist-based minimal guidance during the instruction of novice to intermediate learners.

We have to think of new kinds of assignment problems which would have enough variety and need wide range of approaches. For example instead of having routine assignments of the type 'Write a program to do 'X'.', we could instead have problems of the following type (ref: Becker Blog)

1. Fix this program.
2. Document this program.
3. Trace a program.
4. Explain a program.
5. Identify differences between two programs.
6. Convert pseudocode into a program.
7. Teach someone else about this feature of programming.

The issue of improving the current settings in a scalable manner remains open.

Musicians' Anguish

IIIT portrays itself as an institute that encourages and supports all kinds of extra-curricular activities and arts. It even employs faculty from the neighbouring Hyderabad Central University for some HSSM courses. Here, we plan on showcasing the reality of only one such field, that of music.

A large number of students come to college with hopes of pursuing their hobbies which they suppressed for "those crucial years" when they studied for the entrance examinations.

Many students, hoping to find an activity that they enjoy doing. want to experiment with new hobbies, often music. They look to the college to provide them the opportunity to do so with facilities such as a music club.

One of the most basic requirements for a music club is a music room, due to the size and value of instruments to be stored and maintained. Ideally a music room would be a well equipped, sound proofed room close to the hostels. Unfortunately, the situation is far from ideal.

At present, we do not have a permanent music room. The previous one was where the faculty mess now is, and that too was used as a store for yuktahaar. The ad-hoc room for now is SH3 and is only given at times when it is indispensable, such as the October Flakes (not to mention that it is also an temporary room for various other activities). The condition of the instruments owned by the college is also abysmal with no care or maintenance.

Now with Felicity fast approaching, the bands in the college are at a loss of a practice space. The drummers are the most affected as keeping a drumkit in the hostel rooms is impractical.

Such a room would not be only for practitioners of musical instruments but for music lovers as well. It could also be used to hold regular theory and practical classes.

We hope the concerned people take action as soon as possible.

J.V. 2K10: A Review

The dawn of the new semester for UG1 brought with it "Jeevan Vidya Shivir", famous for teaching people the art of living a happy and prosperous life. After a relaxing span of holidays, the students witnessed a different campus atmosphere unlike the burdening first semester as there was no academic activity but only long hours of discussion ,enriching "prabodhans" and introspection of oneself. The workshop started just after the day of academic registration and was conducted for a week, aiming to cover a wide spectrum of life's philosophies and human values.

The students gave a mixed response to this workshop. Few thought of it to be quite productive and aim to practice the ideas conveyed through the workshop in daily life while propagating them to others. The views and ideas expressed in JV encouraged them to review their relations from different perspectives. It changed their criteria of judging people, and helped them in developing the right understanding of human behaviour. They also understood the relation between humans and their surroundings and learnt how to appreciate nature.

Besides this, a considerable amount of contradictory response also came up. There were students who believed : "Let alone the student expectations , Jeevan Vidya did not even seem to fulfill its own aim." Many were of the opinion that the philosophies explained in the workshop were very difficult to follow and the very traditional "lecturing" method further lead to a dull atmosphere during the prabodhans. The deep and densely composed ideas proposed in JV Shivir of seven days seemed insufficient to explain the 'Vidya of Jeevan' (knowledge of life) to the students still undergoing personality metamorphosis. JV was found to be lacking practical importance and acceptance by a section of the students, who could neither relate themselves with the JV views nor could realize its stand in their daily lives .

With a mixed response, the workshop that enlightened a few minds also left the agony in the minds of the rest unanswered - "Would making students attend JV compulsorily actually help it achieve its ultimate goal? Would it not be better to make JV optional?"

It would be apt to sum up the entire workshop in the words of a student - "I really found the workshop helpful for making me realize the difference between 'BODY' and 'I' and to find out what my self is satisfied by. JV helped me realize the ultimate aim of my life – To be happy and help the needy. My real happiness lies in their happiness !!! ". Other frantic minds completed the picture by an antithesis -- " JV helped me to realize my ultimate goal – To ban JV for the future batches !!! My real happiness lies in their happiness !!! ". Well different 'people' , different 'views' !

Finance Meetings

Over the years, IIIT has come up as an institute fully dedicated to Information Technology and its applications. But unlike several other technical institutes, where financial discussion groups too play an active role in the educational skeleton, we didn't have something known as Finance Group, which was something that all the students seemed to be missing since a long time. But now, the students have geared up to fill this void too.

Recently, the first meeting of IIIT Finance group was held in the campus .It all started as a mail on the Life mailing list, giving a call to people interested in understanding how the world of finance works and the response was huge. As this was the first meeting of the Finance Group, the future goals and agenda of the group were discussed in the meeting.

It was decided that in the future meetings, Quantitative methods of financial analysis such as Return, Sampling and Estimation will be discussed, and the whole anatomy of economy-including Micro economic structure, Market Structure, Macroeconomic Concept will be analyzed. The attendants of the meet gave their suggestions that there should be discussion on Financial reporting and analysis of Taxation methods, techniques and their applications. Apart from these major issues, corporate finance, portfolio management and Equity Investments were the major topics that were decided to be included in the future meets.

The response of students towards this idea has been very enthusiastic. They said that they have waited several years for this and so, have high expectations from these meetings. One of the members brought to the notice of the attendants that this course was very important from the industrial point of view, and so, instead of treating it as a course, it should be known as 'An experience of financial world' !!!!!!

As an introduction to financial terms and present financial scenario, the difference between 'economy' and 'finance' was highlighted, along with the discussion of two basic terms of finance-'demand' and 'supply'. The meaning and significance of GDP and GDI was discussed, and the role of women in finance was briefly mentioned in the meeting.

 While talking about present day economic and financial conditions, the first thing that comes to mind is RECESSION. This global issue was also touched upon in the meeting..Discussions were held on various aspects of recession, like when and why does it happen, why did it happen this time, what were the impacts of recession etc. A brief glimpse was thrown on the famous Lehmann Brother's case, which is believed to have triggered the present recession period .

Also, discussions were held about how long this period may last, and the major difference between two analogous terms - recession and depression -was outlined. India's role in this tough time was also discussed and the whole scenario was analyzed from India's perspective.

This meeting was appreciated by all the attendants, as they remarked that this is an excellent effort towards creation of financial awareness and knowledge amongst the future techno-experts .Hoping that IIITians succeed in this venture too .

CMU Winter School

RSAO

Last year's winter saw a lot of UG students stay back in college to attend Winter School 2009 (10th-22nd December), a collaboration between IIIT-Hyderabad and Carnegie Mellon University.

Professor Kishore Prahllad along with the faculty from CMU introduced the students to the process of research and involved them in application based projects during the thirteen day period. The first three days included panel discussions and guest lectures about the Indian education system and research as a career option, during which time a lot of students decided to walk out of the school as their experience didn't match their expectations.

This was followed by an intensive workshop with project work in each of the three tracks.
1.Computer Supported Collaborative Learning
   Corpus data analysis to identify sentiments in group learning spaces.
2.Educational Games
   Fun learning games on cheap and accessible devices for the under-privileged primary school student.
3.Speech Assessment
   Speech recognition and its applications such as password detection and speaker identification.

Country-wide participants from colleges such as the IITs, NITs, DAIICT etc. fostered an enthusiastic learning environment and worked tirelessly under the expert guidance of Carolyn Rose, Matthew Kam and Bhiksha Raj.

While some students found the program nothing more than an exposure to the western teaching methodology, others found it to be a very productive winter giving them an insight into their chosen technical field.
The workshop ended with the presentations of the student projects on the last two days. One student from each track is expected to fly to Pittsburgh this summer for an internship program, while the rest of the 50 -odd students will be left without any recognition/certificate.

Students @ CMU Workshop

It is said "change is the only constant" . Well , the new attendance policy in IIIT stands no exception to it ! The introduction of "RESPONSIBLE STUDENTS' ATTENDANCE OPTION" or RSAO has again proved that IIIT is ready to experiment in its urge to promote learning !

The new option allows the option of attendance waiver to students with a condition attached. As opposed to the mandatory attendance of 85% failing which a grade (or more) is dropped, a student opting for RSAO can choose to attend classes at his whim subject to the condition that he should secure a minimum grade of B. In case he fails to do this, he will be awarded F in that subject.

This new scheme has certainly ushered a new ray of hope amongst the students concerning the academics but not without certain misgivings. Many feel that in order to make the fullest out of this opportunity , a student needs to be given enough time beforehand to decide if he wishes to exercise this option . " Within a duration of a week or two, it is nearly impossible for any student to find out how comfortable he is with the subject and if he can take the risk of failing in it" - voices one student. The scheme has been introduced as an option to those students who have a 'responsible' attitude towards studies and will not abuse this option just to lie in bed all day long.

The faculty has also ensured that in case of any quizzes missed, the marks will be extrapolated so that the student does not miss out on those marks. In that case, raising the bar for a pass grade seems understandable, however, what most students can't agree with is the lowest permitted pass grade - B. As one student says, "our academic policy identifies 'B-' as to mark an average performance. Isn't degrading 'B-' to 'F' not too harsh?"

However, any new experiment always receives both bouquets and brickbats. Only time will tell how successful this one will turn out to be.

Signing off on a welcoming note to mark the 'absence' of the need of 'presence' ....`
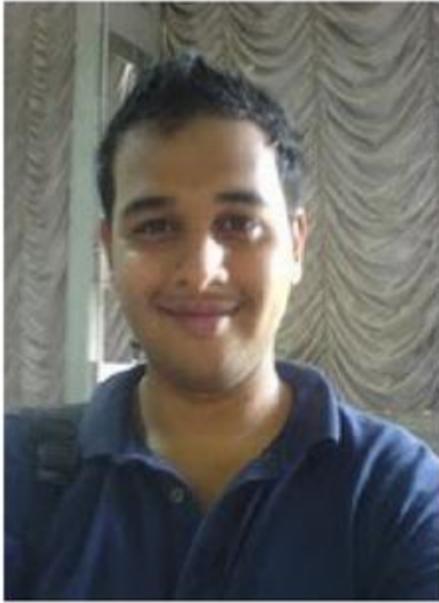
PING RECOMMENDS

Celebrate this valentine's day with VALENTINE'S DAY releasing on 14th feb'10 but if you're looking for something different try the movie "NEVER BEEN KISSED" .

Continuing with the spirit of love this week, we suggest that you read the book "now that You're rich.." Away form the mushy notions of love, this book is a refreshing take on love...and money.

We know it's a repetition but ping! recommends that if you're not a rock lover already, start listening to Motherjane so that this Felicity, you can stand up with the rest of 'em and mosh and headbang to glory as this band rocks the night!

Creating Monsters

A blog by Rishabh Mukherjee

I am part of the first dual degree batch. In the beginning there were 60+ of us. After 5.5 years and about a 100+ research papers later, most of us are still here. The question most of me and my batch mates are asking ourselves is "What next ?". Circumstances have conspired to make us unwanted by most and looked at sceptically by the remaining.

As the placement process unravels it's becoming clearer that our degrees, our work and our orientation is becoming an unbearable burden. Companies feel that we are either too "research minded" to work for them or likely to run away for a PhD. So most want nothing to do with us. Those who are ok with us, tend to have a selection process we are ill prepared for. If somebody were to ask me about crypto or cvit people about vision or Sarika about RoboCup we would blow them out of the water. Sadly nobody seems to want to ask us these things. It seems that data structures and puzzles are the flavour of the day. Most ug4's have spent the last 2 months, working very hard to prepare for the placement season. Most of us have spent the last 2 months making a final thrust to get that last paper accepted or to start giving shape to our thesis. Not an ideal scenario. The faculty would like to believe that having exposed us to top class research, many of us would be motivated to pursue higher studies. 2 out of 60+ have gone for a PhD. Not numbers to go wild about. This begs the question : Has IIIT created a (confused)monster with it's dual degree programs ?
While I leave this question as a topic for open debate, I do have a few questions about the dual degree program.

Section 1 : Jobs

Q1: Are there relevant jobs for 60 dual degree graduates in Computer science and Electronics ?
Q:2 Has the institute (faculty) spent enough time educating companies about the dual degree program ?
Q3: Has the institute made an effort to educate companies that the hiring process they follow for ug's is not optimal for MSbR
Q4: Has each faculty member asked himself how he can help get his students a job ?
Q5: Do the Institute and the faculty have a burden of responsibility to help get a student a job ?
Q6: Are all faculty members in agreement with or even

aware of this ?

Section 2: The Research

Q1: Has there been an effort to normalize/standardize the quality of MS thesis' ?
Q2: Has there been an effort to analyze the quality of research work done as part of this program?
Q3: Have we asked ourselves if we are publishing for the sake of publishing ?
Q4: Have all students been provided the means to present their research work at the relevant forums (i.e. sponsorship for conferences) ?
Q5: Do we provide enough faculty and by extension research areas for our students to work on?
Q6: Do we always have the resources to help a student complete his/her work ?

Section 3: The program itself

Q1: Almost all the dual degree students will complete their degree in 6 years. In this aspect is the program satisfactory?
Q2: Why is the proportion of students from DD interested in pursuing a PhD so dismal ?
Q3: Has the institute thought about students stuck in the program even unable to do their B.Tech ?
Q4: Does an average High School student understand what he is getting into when choosing DD?
Q5: Has the institute taken initiatives to ensure that every DD student is at least paid a minimum stipend apart from a tuition wavier?

Questions for the future:

Q1: Considering the issues computer science and electronics dual degree students have, was it prudent to introduce other courses like PostBSc, DD in computational natural sciences and DD in computational linguistics ?

Q2: Will we have a complete overhaul in the way we go about dealing with the DD students and their future aspirations, be it a job or a PhD or even an MBA ?

Q3: Is the institute going to clean up it's act when it comes to financial planning, to ensure students are paid a decent stipend and provided adequate funds for presenting their research work?

For more information visit:
http://rmshark.blogspot.com/2009/12/creating-monsters.html

R&D Showcase

Since time immemorial, man has tried to describe nature and its functioning in simple ways has always been elusive. Man gave this simplification a label, "Research". In a nutshell one can safely assume that research is nothing but 'formalized curiosity'. The solutions to this curiosity were on display in IIITH on 30 and 31 Jan at its annual R&D showcase.

The annual RnD showcase of IIIT-H was organized on 30th and 31st January. It was a platform for the students of IIIT-H to exhibit the work going on in the Institute. The event was a great hit - around 1500 students and faculty from other colleges in Hyderabad and nearby areas visited the exposition. Companies such as Microsoft, Yahoo, Google, Amazon, Intel, Samsung et al also came with an eye for probable interns.

The faculty gave valuable suggestions and encouraged the students. The media coverage on the second day doubled the enthusiasm of the students. Innovative ideas such as Disguise Master, 3D Reconstruction, Hot Topics in News Feed, I-Slate Test bed, Voice Conversation, Annotation based retrieval from Multimedia, IIIT Alumni Finder to name a few left the visitors in awe.

The ping team also acknowledges the work done by the volunteers during installations and in guiding the guests. They stood out in their jerseys and were easy to spot.
On the whole, the event was a success but there were a few minor glitches such as when the printer stooped working. As a result, some posters had to be printed from outside which caused a lot of inconvenience. The lesson to be learnt from this is that we must do these kinds of job in advance rather than in the end.

IIIT Upgraded

The IIIT-H intranet has undergone significant changes recently. The OBH, NBH and Girls hostel have been provided with wired LAN connections in each room. Earlier only the Ground floor and E-block of OBH had this facility. It is a significant improvement over the wireless connections which were in place earlier.

More importantly, the whole service is backed up by generators capable of providing power to the network for over 24 hours. A 20Mb/s internet link (Beam Cable) is now dedicated to the hostels. To the disappointment of many who use the college proxy (the good old 204) from labs in the Main Building and Research block, the link speed for the college proxy has been scaled down to 4Mb/s (Sify) from the previous 8Mb/s (STPI).

The connectivity from server room to the hostels is provided by optical fibre cables. The wiring inside the hostel has been done with CAT-6 wires which are capable of 1GBps connectivity.

The core and distribution switches provided for the hostels are CISCO equipments. The wireless equipments used in OBH-D block also are CISCO devices. The current servers are IBM rack servers which use quad core technology. Earlier IBM E-series servers were in use.

The firewall which is being used is CISCO ASA firewall. The intrusion protection system is Radware Defense Pro.

Future plans include providing wireless connectivity in open spaces like playgrounds, lawns, cafeteria etc. One particular purpose of this will be to provide back up when the wired network fails.

The Ping team would like to express its gratitude to Mr. T Rama Krishna for providing us with inputs.

For those who are still thirsty for technical details :

- Class A address schema is being used for the IP address except for wireless LAN and teaching labs.

The hostels rooms in a particular hostel are in a separate collision domain so traffic directed from one hostel room to other wouldn't go all the way to the server room.

Idiot of the Month

Every educational institution has *idiots*. And by *idiot* what we mean here is - a person whose motto in life is "**i**'ll **d**o **it** **o**n my **t**erms"...

No, we're not talking about Rancho, Farhan & Raju from *3 idiots*. Our college has seen a few *idiots* of it's own. Some have left, some are still here... If a guy has a <7 GPA, declined job offers from companies like Rediff & Airvana, and yet earns as much as many of his placed batchmates right from his hostel room... well, he's definitely an *idiot*. Whozzit??? Kulbir Saini.

Let's rewind, and take a peek at some of the high points of his life at IIIT. The year, 2005. A young boy from Yamunanagar, Haryana set foot in IIIT, Hyderabad with an AIEEE rank of 723, branch CSE and (yes, this may come as a surprise to many!) absolutely ZERO prior exposure to Computers!! Well, before he knew it, inspired by his favourite seniors (and sysadmins at that time), Nirnimesh and Sunil Mohan Ranta, he cultivated a passion for Linux. The first few semesters passed, and people knew, "Linux problem? go to Kulbir Saini."

When too many people ask you the same questions, you tend to put them in writing for all others to read. Perhaps that led to the creation of *kulbir-saini.wordpress.com* - A blog for linux related posts. The content was excellent, the topics well chosen. No wonder, it gained popularity and following from all around the world. Solely on the basis of his Linux skills, Mr.Saini bagged the post of student Sysadmin at IIIT. Being a Sysadmin is a great way of learning new things, practical solutions to issues faced by users and administrators.

And of course, it looks great on your résumé! Soon his interests and areas of expertise widened, spanning Networking, Server Administration, a decent knowledge of hardware and of course, the omnipresent Linux. By the time he reached his 4th semester, Mr.Saini was freelancing on the internet for web-design & server setup, management etc. The wordpress blog had now become a mere redirector to his website *fedora.co.in* and things were going extremely well (not to mention the money that was coming in, both from freelancing work and advertising on the website).

Working closely with entrepreneurs earned him experience too. In the 5th semester, he knew he wasn't made for doing an industry job; "I can work with anyone, but I don't think I can work under anyone", he admits. He seriously contemplated dropping out of the B.Tech course! But it's a hard fact that most people believe that the degree matters most, so he decided to stay. However, the lure of a stellar GPA or a phenomenal job-placement no longer drove him.

In his 6th sem, he scaled new heights by getting selected for the highly prestigious Google Summer Of Code (GSOC) for his project "intelligent-mirror", a plugin for YUM (Yellowdog Updater Modified -- the package downloader & manager of RedHat based flavours of Linux). Here he worked with Seth Vidal, a linux pioneer and the creator of YUM.

What began as a simple plugin for squid (the ubiquitous Linux proxy-server), to store youtube videos locally for faster access on subsequent requests, became an instant hit when posted on his blog.

The *Youtube Cache* project was born, which has now been made compatible with a large range of Streaming Video providers and is called *Videocache* (www.cachevideos.com). It is used worldwide by many corporate ventures and is deployed at IIIT with our proxy servers too. So much for his technical achievements. Mr.Saini is an avid LAN Gamer, and admits he was bitten by the Age of Empires bug for 4 semesters.

Hindi song listeners in the campus would know the tag of *Bordeaux* which is stamped on a great many files procured from the DC++. Dwellers of a certain ground floor wing in the OBH would swear by his love for Punjabi music, which streams out of his room at all sorts of strange hours (the hostel warden requested him to tone it down a good many times!). So what's our *idiot* doing these days? He's *not* running a school for linux entrepreneurs in Kashmir...

He's pursuing an M.S. here at IIIT under the guidance of Prof. Rawat and uses his free time for furthering his projects, and catering to the occasional freelance job.

We wish him the best in all his pursuits in life, and hats off to him for setting an example for others, that course work isn't everything. And being different is good.

PS: visit http://saini.co.in for regular info & updates :)

PEN STAND

A cause of rising discontent in IIIT-H students

There is too much blog rambling in our college about various problems students have. Any problem one faces is the result of one's own inaction to identify or foresee the problem to take necessary precautions.

Any university is bound to have conflicts between students and faculty. It is inevitable. But where IIIT-H fails is in its inability to create a proper safety valve to vent the frustration out. We don't have a strong student representative body which commands respect from the faculty. We, the alumni, are in a way responsible for this situation as only some of us acted whenever required on a case by case basis. We didn't have the chance to establish a proper representation system even if we wanted to.

In march 2005, there were elections which, I reckon, changed the faculty's attitude towards students. After voting, the elections were cancelled without declaring the results. Though there were complaints of malpractices, we never came to know what they were. The faculty completely scrapped the procedure of elections just after the first session of the student parliament that was inaugurated in August 2004.

While we were trying to bring elections back, the faculty unequivocally refused to bring back the old model. And so the new parliament model started being followed from August 2006. As with anything new, we faced a few problems as well.

The first problem was house loyalty did not figure for most - many didn't even know which house they belonged to. Moreover, this system became more of a selected parliament than an elected parliament. While earlier, the house representatives were selected on the basis of their talent/dedication towards the house, now they had to be selected in a way that they could represent the students as well.

One might say it was people in previous batches who readily took the responsibility that solved the problems and these days almost none of the current students are willing to come forward. However, it is foolish to think that nobody is 'willing to come forward'. If it seems that many people don't 'come forward' willingly, it may simply be the case that the current system couldn't provide the necessary platform for such people.

In our first year, we decided to have a three-CR system. I was one of the three elected though I was not at all interested in contesting or doing the job but took it anyway because someone else had enough confidence in me to suggest my name. After two more elections in January and August, 2005, there were no more elections. Reason – laziness and fear of creating rifts.

Fortunately, our batch opted for another method to keep the elected representatives on their toes. Questioning them. "What the heck are you doing with that CRship of yours?" However, relying on such system is not practical in the long run.

There are two kinds of people who can solve problems: those who take initiative and those who are asked to take initiative.

Elections for fixed positions of responsibility/authority not only tap the potential of the second kind (like it did in my case) but also increases first kind's ability to command respect which is why positions like CRs, labcoms, sports council,etc should be strengthened by having a fair recruitment process regularly. Elections bring out able people who are willing to come forward but hesitate to take the initiative. They give more authority to students to question the representatives. If the current model does not work then the students must find another model which suits our college better.

Without any such system in place, it is a futile at

attempt to complain about whatever issue we have about the administration or faculty through blogs. Besides not serving any purpose, such blog posts devalue IIIT-H in public. It is ridiculous to expect faculty to indulge in flame wars (sometimes anonymously) on the internet with other anonymous commentators.

Our faculty must shed their fears about elections in the campus. As current students have human values training which we lacked, the ill-effects of elections are less likely to jeopardize the harmony among them. Establishing a strong and accountable student parliament in the college is the need of the hour.

By D N Rohith UG2K4

*Comic Vision *

We are more likely to live healthy and happy lives if we maintain our physical and emotional resilience. To do so we can develop our "comic vision"--a way of perceiving the world that allows us to be receptive to the humour around and within us. In this way we can perceive humour in our environment and experience the healing potential of humour as it assists us to become healthier beings through its ability to help us change and manage our biochemical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural states.

For those of you who watch what you eat...

Here's the Final word on nutrition and health. It's a relief to know the truth after all those conflicting medical studies.

- The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the Aussies, British or Americans.
- The Mexicans eat a lot of fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the Aussies, British or Americans.
- The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the Aussies, British or Americans.
- The Italians drink excessive amounts of red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the Aussies, British or Americans.

- The Germans drink a lot of beer and eat lots of sausages and fats and suffer fewer heart attacks than the Aussies, British or Americans.

CONCLUSION: Eat and drink what you like. Speaking English is what kills you.

Some Words Of Wisdom ...

- It's always darkest before dawn. So if you're going to steal your neighbour's newspaper, that's the time to do it.
- It may be that your sole purpose in life is simply to serve as a warning to others.
- If you think nobody cares if you're alive, try missing a couple of fee payments.
- Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in his shoes. That way, when you criticize him, you're a mile away and you have his shoes.
- Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach him how to fish, and he will sit in a boat and drink beer all day.

Steven Wright says...

- Everyone has a photographic memory, some just don't have film.
- Borrow money from pessimists -- they don't expect it back.
- 99% of lawyers give the rest a bad name.
- A conscience is what hurts when all your other parts feels so good.
- If everything seems to be going well, you have obviously overlooked   something.
- When everything is coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.
- Hard work pays off in the future, laziness pays off now.
- If at first you don't succeed, destroy all evidence that you tried.
- A conclusion is the place where you got tired of thinking.
- To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism; to steal from many is research.

By Pragya Saxena

*The scope for improvisation ? *

Let us take a student-poll on the three factors below.

'Retention' factor :

Why not make available to students the videos of the lectures   ?

It is undisputed that live attention to live lecture is the best option. But what we are talking about is review and recalling of the examples explained during the lecture, doubt sessions, queries and answers during the lecture etc. With this option, the additional explanation, doubt-clarification, etc. during the lecture which cannot be fully remembered becomes available to the students.

Lets us take consider a prospective case :

The student attends a lecture on particular weekday. The student make notes during the lecture, but has to go through the notes and the slides in few days either for study, for an assignment or exams. Many points have not been scribbled in the notes - the student knows that.

But no problem, the student can watch the video of the lecture again the evening of a scheduled day within a week. Still better if it is loaded on IIIT site, in which case the student can refer to the video any time, and **n** number of times. And thus improve his/her understanding a great deal.

What say, friends ? Why should we hunt for online video lectures when we can have our own ?

Working it out may be cumbersome initially, but it can be surely implemented. It will do us all good. And of course - attendance will only be for the live   lectures   !

'Reconciliation' factor :

Why not make available to the students the solutions to the assignments (after the submission dates of course!)?

We need to reconcile our answers with the solu-

tions advised by the faculty/TA. Most of us are not doing that and we continue debating about the answers.

The solutions should also be uploaded the way the assignments are.

'Rejuvenating' factor :

What about a 24-hour (open!) canteen ?

No Sir, soup and coffee won't do for a hungry nocturnal coder !   Seriously.

By Sashi Kumar , MTech (CSIS) , 200906006

Swagatham 2K10

The New Year and the new decade were given a warm and joyous welcome by the IIITians, as for the first time, the campus enthralled with the beats of New Year DJ party! Yes, after several years of persuading in vain, the students finally succeeded in getting the permission from Prof. Abhijit Mitra, to have a dance party inside the campus, for celebrating the arrival of the New Year. The permission was granted a just a few hours before the first hour of New Year.

The joy of students knew no bounds, when the news of the party spread throughout the campus. Through the efforts of Mudit (UG3), Raghav (UG1) and Shantanu (UG1), arrangements for the party were made with full enthusiasm, in just two hours! The volleyball court echoed with the footsteps of the New Year.

As the students came together to shake their bodies to the beat of the music, the volleyball court was turned into a splendid discotheque. The party reached its climax when the clock ticked 12 midnight, as everyone raised their voices to the loudest, to cheer and greet the New Year. Waves of joy and happiness swept throughout the campus, announcing the arrival of 2K10.

The party was followed by the usual exchange of New Year greetings and SMS .The party celebrations and the underlying efforts of the students

were highly appreciated by everyone .Needless to mention , this year is lucky enough to be the first one to get such a pompous welcome. Hoping that it also brings the same good luck for the IIITians too .... :-)

IIIT Food Joints

Gone is the time when you had to sit in your room with a packet of biscuits or other snacks and still an empty stomach. The past few months have seen changes not just inside the campus but outside IIIT as well.

An army of shops serving mouth watering food which tops the desire list of our forever starved IIITians now resides 'dangerously' close to IIIT. The colored sign board of "PIZZA CORNER" & "CREAM & FUDGE FACTORY" used to mercilessly scorch many hearts because of their closed shutters. But the new year brought back the long lost smiles on the faces of our budding engineers.

The pizza lovers who think that they have tried almost every delicacy and have grown tired can now quench the thirst of their tingling taste buds with new flavors at the "PIZZA CORNER".

After you have had your fill we have a gammet of options available in desserts at "CAKES & MORE" ranging from the sinful chocolate mousse to sultry passion fruit cake or a modest slice of white forest. If even that does not satiate your hungry soul you can play around with all new famous of "CREAM & FUDGE FACTORY". Ending on a remembrance note lets pay our homage to the happening stalls of DLF who have fed us for so long but have now left a big void in our lives and bigger one in our pockets!!!

Trivia

Music within the mess
Most of the people who eat at Yuktahaar or NBH were left confused or simply amused when their ears were greeted by the sound of the sitar and tabla playing in the mess. Seems that the management has decided to provide value added services in the mess! The actual reason for putting up the speakers? Well even we are clueless about that. Since it is already done, why not have a poll to select the song list ? Are you listening MessCom?

NBH Shop : Better and Improved
This will come as a great news to most of the people in our campus. The shop in the NBH cellar is now better

equipped. It serves Kwality Walls ice-cream, soft drinks and has other snacks, perfect to satisfy those cravings for some junk food we all have.

Grasshopper
Around the campus there was a dearth of coffee shops. Well, not anymore. Come January, a small café serving reasonably priced coffee has come up opposite the DLF Complex Gate Number 3. The place also has a variety of dishes in the main course.

Pun Unintended

Agony Aunt

There are no washed glasses on Water Cooler if at all they are there, in IIIT.
Our Comment- Time to wake Campus Council

The Non-Veg Mess undergoes changes (such as prices , quality etc) quite often without notification.
Our Comment - A Job for Non-Veg Mess Handler.
BTW who is he ?

Poll Results

Here are some of the poll results of the last Poll:-

Should Eggs be allowed in Messes(1-twice) a week?
- Total Votes:- 283
- Yes :- 252
- No:- 31

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