

# PING!

APRIL 2018

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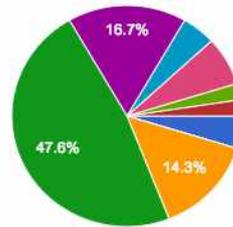
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Articles in the magazine are not representative of the views of the Student Life Committee of IIIT Hyderabad.

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# Editorials

## The Mystery of the Many Documents of IIIT

Documents are by nature an elusive entity. All students would remember being handed over that heavy “book” of documents when they took admission. Most students throw it in a corner (or trash bin) without a first look. Usually, precedents from experience (trickled down from senior students) are considered as reference points when it comes to possible actions, which makes sense in a community. Of course, there are documented rules, but the implementation is often relaxed to have practical significance.

In the recent Intranet overhaul, and the implementation of the new IMS, a lot of these documents have been revised, and suddenly brought into implementation. One such sudden implementation was the PT probation, that lead to the infamous email squabble, that had to be settled by temporarily withholding that implementation. It has been speculated before that this was simply an outcome of not involving students in the implementation process in the first place.

As mentioned earlier, the precedents from experience are usually what survive in the minds of the students, rather than the laxly implemented documents. Hence, in moving to newer systems and reviving old rules, the institute must also keep in mind the practical precedents that have been set, and move accordingly.

Besides the revisions, several new documents (PT credit, Institutes Committees Structure & Responsibilities among others) have also been uploaded. The laxness in drafting these new documents has already been scrutinized in a previous Ping article (*Commentary on Disciplinary Committee Decisions, Ping Nov '17*). The latest PT credit document also met with scrutiny on the Facebook Life@IIIT-H group for being incomplete; inadequately accounting for health contingencies, for instance. Again, the lack of student involvement in drafting these documents hurts the administration's efforts. But here, there's also apparent neglect from the administration's side in not being thorough in their effort.

The vacant disconnect between the documents and the practicality of implementation is only going to create more hassle than convenience (as documents are actually supposed to), and only more allegations of “whimsical administration” at IIIT.

## Student Bodies on Campus

Recently, there has been very explicit reproof of the college administration for not involving students in many decision-making processes. However, as has not been made so explicit, some of the important student bodies have proved sluggish and uninterested in being involved in the process. Ping has made some of this explicit with the already-published piece on the inactivity of the SACB (*Everything's Not Right with the SACB, Ping Mar '18*), and *The Induction Schedule*

*in Review* article in this issue that mentions how many of the first year students were unsatisfied with the Apex. A large part of this criticism is directed towards the current membership of these student bodies.

The existing members nominate future members for most of these important student bodies, including the SACB and the Apex. There have been allegations of gross nepotism, and we can't deny that there is a certain degree of truth to these rumours. In the past, this selection process has worked as the members put responsibility above nepotism, but the current members have clearly failed to do so, rendering the student bodies in a very bad place. This criticism has been laid on both the SACB and the Apex.

With the revisions in curriculum as well as the admission process, the student bodies has even greater liability. It's high time that the members rise above their biases, and start making responsible and mature decisions. Either that, or a revised selection process with greater scrutiny should be brought into place. If the situation continues the way it has, we will have a very regrettable disconnect between the administration and the students, which will make life miserable for all.

## The Revised Admission Process for Dual Degree Students

In its 10-year revision process, the college has now revised its admission process completely. All the dual degree students will now be tested based on a separate, college-conducted exam and interview process, rather than being admitted through the JEE exam. There has been a lot of excitement over this, with hopes that the student intake would improve by large, and the insecurities and misunderstandings with dual degree programs can also be addressed. However, this is also very likely to affect the student diversity in the college, which already suffers with the lack of reserved classes.

The JEE exam is a popular exam, taken by students from the smallest towns. This new admission process will likely attract only students from bigger cities that have better outreach. The exam centers themselves are limited to some cities. The only efforts in extending this outreach so far seem to have been the YouTube videos, and other online efforts. However, this is certainly insufficient in reaching out to the smaller cities, something that the JEE exam easily accomplishes.

Whether this is an acceptable trade-off in the end, however, is arguable. If we deem it acceptable, we risk being considered “elitist”, and also missing out on some bright sparks that may have found fire at IIIT. If we deny it though, we still remain with the problem of “research at gunpoint”, where the students have naively taken admission, and the institute has granted research admissions to students with not the slightest inclination and/or aptitude for research. Perhaps, a

middle ground will eventually be achieved.

## Saswata Departs

Nothing is more apparent in college than the sudden disappearance of Professor Saswata Shannigrahi from college - our mailboxes can tell us as much. While several people complained that the mails he sent were spam, and Ping itself has criticized his methods in the past, he was inarguably a popular voice for the students, raising many issues considered important by the students but completely sidelined by other faculty members. While we would not like to add more fuel to the many rumours on why he left, we do hope that some of his suggestions may be taken up for discussion in the Parliament, and possibly implemented by the college.

## A Case for Introduction of More Literature Courses

Scouring through the old course offerings in the IIIT archives seems to indicate that the quality of humanities courses in our college has seemingly been a roller-coaster ride. While at some point we had such exciting courses as "Readings from Science Fiction", we also had a semester with the only humanities course offerings being performing arts or related

courses. The most recent major change in the humanities course offerings came in Monsoon 2016, with many courses on social sciences being added. However, following further revisions, there seems to be an abundance of pure social science course offerings.

In our discussions with students from other colleges, some of the most exciting humanities courses for them have been literature courses, foreign language courses, or courses that have some interdisciplinary elements. The only literature course offerings at present have to do with American Classics, Shakespeare, and Hindi Literature; categories that would seem dull to most students. It would be very exciting to have modern literature courses in the college, and perhaps even some courses on movie culture or film studies; activities which are unfortunately only limited to clubs right now. Such activities when taken up academically get all the more fascinating.

Introduction of such courses is not only progressive, but should also put an end to the animosity that some students feel towards humanities courses. Literature, arts, languages; these are meant to be enchanting potions, not another forced pill for the students to swallow. □



*Credits: Priyank Modi*

# The Induction Schedule in Review

Aditya Morolia  
Atirek Kumar

IIIT Hyderabad always does things 'hatke'. Be it the compulsory attendance, the grade reductions for weird reasons, the course structures, or the morning PT; there is a vamped-up version of everything for us. Everything except how you might spend the first few days of your college life. You can't really change that, can you? For us, the college took charge of this as well. Welcome to IIIT.

workshops. A few notable ones among them were a heartwarming talk by Gopichand, our "favourite" one by Guruji, a talk on time management, theory of knowledge, privacy and intellectual property rights, personal freedom, public health and fire safety.

But the best times during the induction, which I'm sure that the article can't cover, were the ones that we spent outside all these classes and lectures. We spent those times interacting with new people. We met someone new almost everyday. Most of us had previously lived at just one place during our school lives. We were not very used to being at a place where we knew



Credits: Saraansh Tandon

The college decided to greet us with a three week long Induction Program, involving HV and HSS courses, guest lectures and meet-up sessions among ourselves (the cluster meets) and sometimes with our seniors. The idea was to help us adjust to the new environment and get to know our batchmates and seniors. We learnt that the induction schedule that was designed for us was new, and different from those of the previous batches. So we decided to conduct a survey to see what our batch felt about the schedule.

## The New Induction Program

This year, the college decided to integrate the HV (Human Values) and HSS (Humanities and Social Skills, actually Performing Arts) courses with the Induction Program. During that time, we spent 3 to 4 hours everyday on HV where we talked, watched movies and video clips, slept, and pretended to understand what was going on. We also had daily HSS sessions and got to try each of the performing arts for 3 days. We went on a full day Hyderabad city tour, one day of field visit, where we visited an NGO, a COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Associations) camp and some orphanages. There were a lot of guest lectures as well, some as a part of HV, some as introductory

the ones when we worked on getting to know our batchmates and making new friends.

Eventually, the freshers practice began, where we would stay awake through most nights practising, with a lot of "healthy interactions" and "tawa bondas." This seemed like the time when the seniors would decide who would be the one to send on a sprint to get bondas and shawarmas, or the one to give tasks during Felicity and other college events.

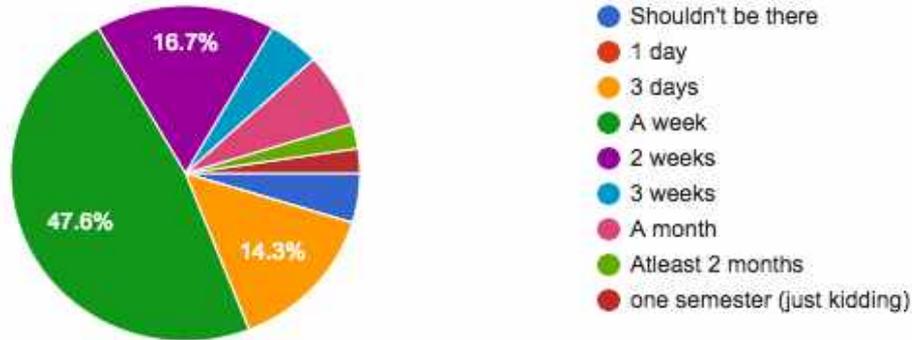
Basically, the college tried to give us a hint of everything they could think of, to make us aware of the diversity and different aspects of college and life. The very open discussions about life, society, God and people, helped us widen our horizon.

## The Batch Survey

(The graphs are on a scale of 1 to 7, 1 being the worst and 7 being the best.)

## How long do you think the induction schedule should have been?

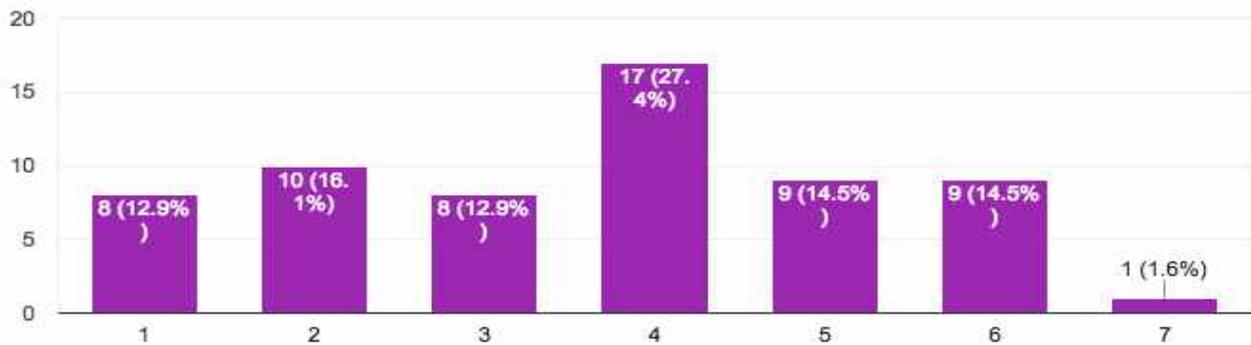
42 responses



IIT, during the induction didn't meet peoples' expectations of "a programming hub" and some were waiting for the academics to start. Let's face it, three weeks is too long a period for an introduction. Most people thought a week would be much more apt, give or take a few weeks.

## Rate the induction programme?

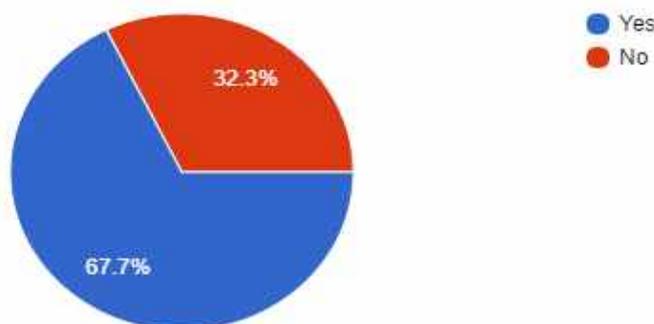
62 responses



Overall, the programme was "pretty okay", with this-is-freakin-awesome moments like Gopichand's lecture and the orientation tour, and I-don't-know-whether-my-head-will-burst-first-or-I-will-be-asleep moments like Guruji's lecture and HV sessions.

## Did the Meetings with Apex help you in your initial days of college?

62 responses

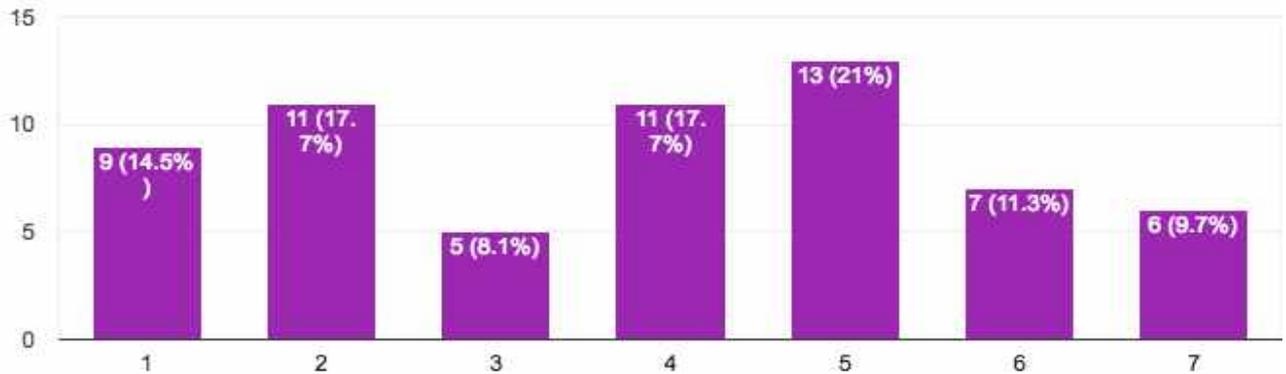


The Apex meetings helped the majority during the initial days of college and the introductory meetings to various college bodies and Felicity were also pretty useful, although some also felt that that time could be used for better lectures and workshops, maybe related to IT. Actually, this was the main problem with the schedule - we felt the quality and topics of the talks and workshops could have been much better.

## The HV sessions

### How would you rate your experience with HV sessions?

62 responses

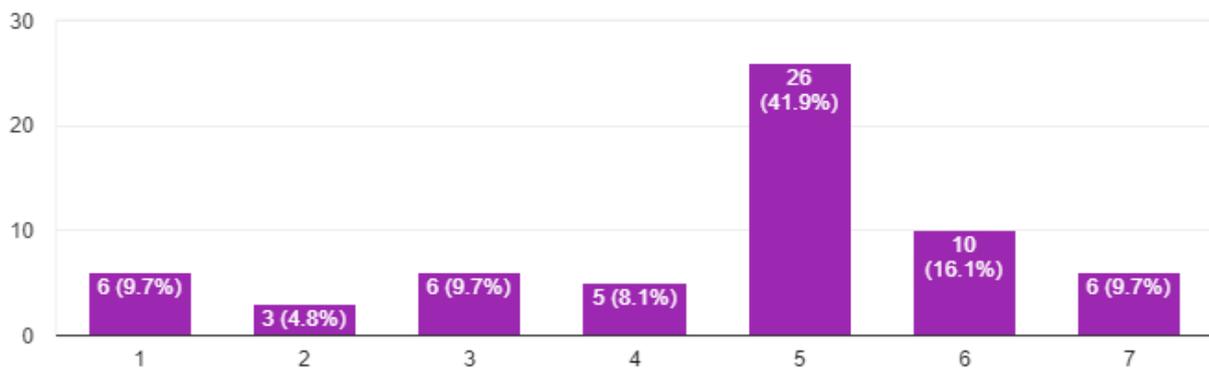


Sit in class, pretend to know what's going on, sleep, repeat the next day: HV summarised. While the majority of IIIT would agree with the above pattern, some actually enjoyed HV and probably benefited from it. HV was mostly about discussing various aspects of life, which would usually get redundant and drab, but sometimes we would get to watch video clips or movies and that was probably the only interesting part of the 4 hours spent.

## The HSS sessions

### How would you rate your experience with HSS sessions?

62 responses

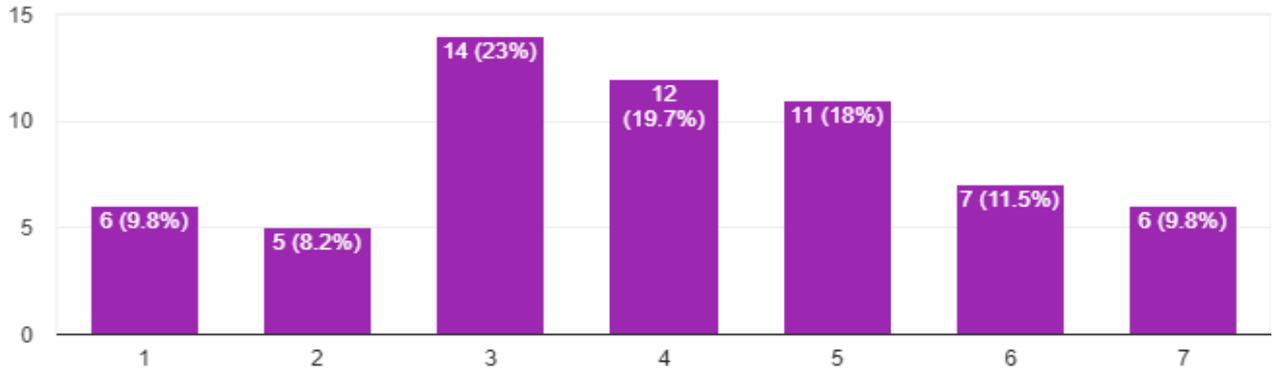


HSS sessions could be very interesting for some because we got to try a lot of things that we had never done before. Most of us aren't dancers (oops, presentational movement-ists), painters, or any sort of artists, but those 15 days were really fun. Most of us liked the idea of learning a new art every 3 days, although many were bored because they had to do something that they probably didn't like. I also felt that we could have had other additions to the current list HSS courses. Perhaps, a book reading, discussion and writing session, because a lot of us are into literature. If the college aims at giving us an experience about how life and world outside our classroom is, it should definitely include a literature and language section as part of HSS. People also said that we could add dance (real dance), drama, film, poetry, embroidery, cooking.

## Guest Lectures and Workshops

Rate the guest lectures and Workshops (Talks by Gopichand, Guruji, Open Source Workshop, Gender Workshop, etc.)

61 responses



Most people would agree that we could have had much better lectures and talks than what we got. From the awesome one by Gopichand and the gender workshop, to a lot of other boring ones, we mostly struggled with attendance. Because who wants to attend a fire drill and a talk on personal hygiene in the college?! Here are some of the responses on asking which events the students would like to remove from the schedule:

- 1) Guruji kinda stuff
  - 2) Nothing in particular, maybe Guruji
  - 3) Guruji's session
  - 4) Guest lectures, Guruji, HV
  - 5) Some of the speeches were damn boring
  - 6) Guruji's talks and the summarisation shit
  - 7) Talks by people like Guruji
- I think you get the point.

The students' enthusiasm during the talks knew no bounds.



Credits: Vignavi S

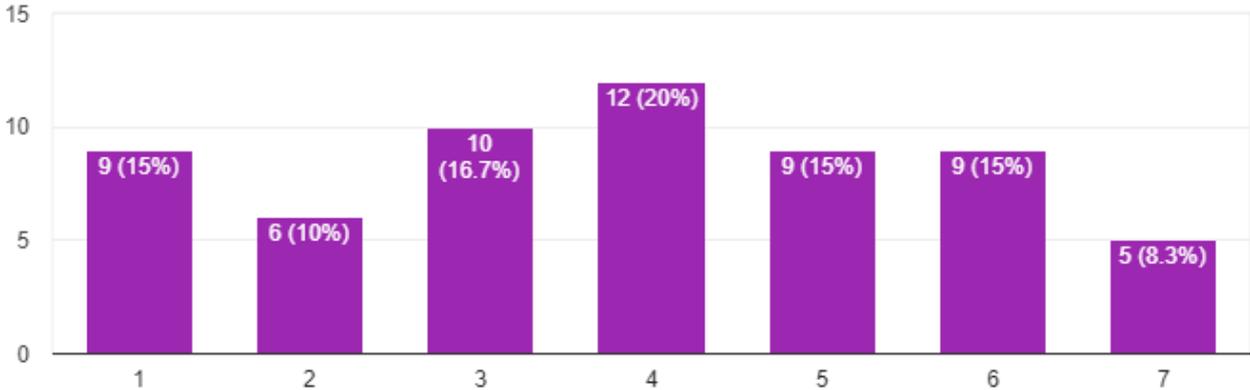
## Orientation Tour

The first part of the trip included a visit to the Golconda Fort which almost everyone liked. It was fun to go to the top but exhausted everyone for the latter part of the trip. Also, it was the first time UG1 got a batch picture. The next stop was Salar Jung museum, and the interestingness of it was debatable; some wanted more time there and some didn't want to be there at all. Overall, it was pretty peaceful and had many interesting display items. The last stop was the Buddha Statue at the Hussain Sagar lake. It was basically a small island with no place to stand and overpriced kulfi and cold drink. Exhausted and suffocating in the crowd, everyone left the island cursing.

When asked to rate the orientation trip, most rated it way above average. After all, this is where we made most of our friends. Many people did mention, however, that more interesting places like Birla Museum and Planetarium, Charminar, or the film city could be added to the list instead of say, Salar Jung. Also, we would have liked to go to Wonderla.

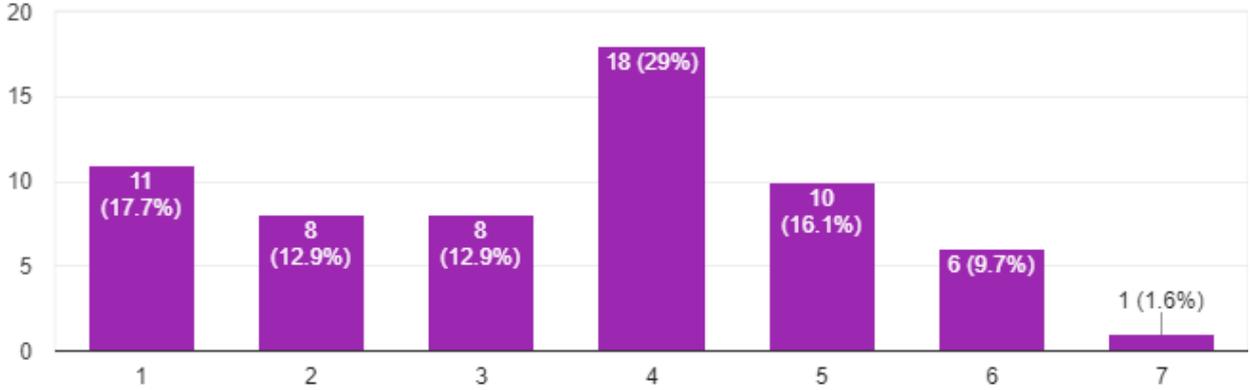
## How would you rate the field visits ( Pochampally, etc :P )?

60 responses



## How much did the program help you to grow as a person?

62 responses



We also asked the people about what events they would like to add to the schedule. Some of the responses were:

- 1) Time Capsule - writing things now that will be kept safe till when you are just about to leave college, and then it will be amusing to dig up the thoughts of four or five years ago
- 2) Speed dating
- 3) Paintball
- 4) ITWS (Some of it could have actually been covered

during Induction as optional session).

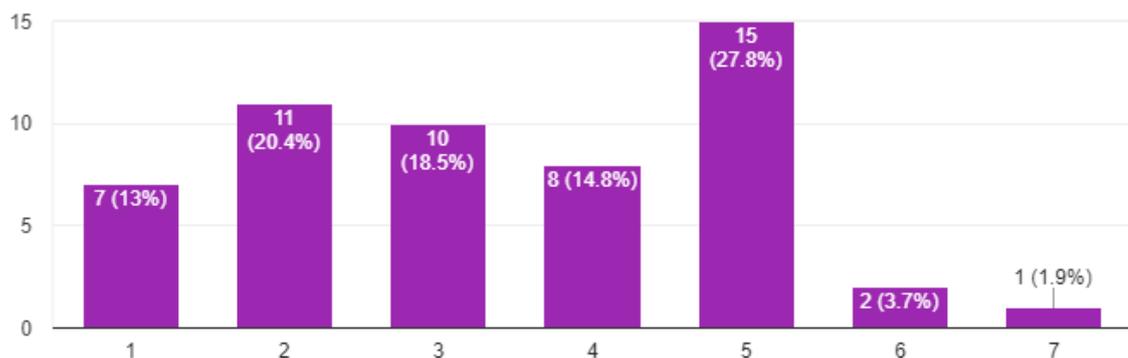
- 5) Workshops on cyber security, intro to coding, graphic design, web development and other streams including sports(not PT)
- 6) More debate club events
- 7) A couple of book-club meetings
- 8) Public ragging
- 9) Several people asked for coding related events (especially for those with no prior knowledge), and an introduction to competitive programming early on.



Finally, a batch picture

The induction program, along with the HV sessions, and the talks was expected to make you a better person ... How much did it succeed in doing so?

54 responses



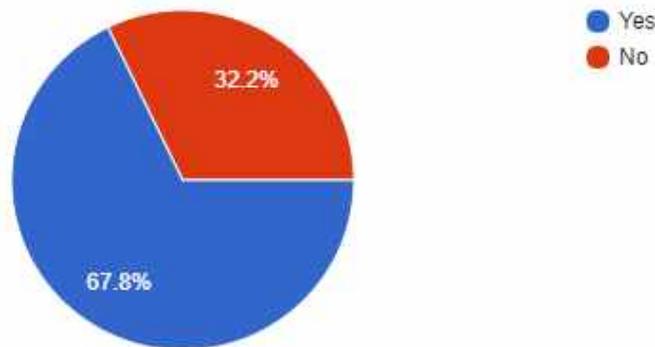
Here are some of the responses when asked about the memorable moments (good and bad) of the schedule:

- 1) The one question at the end of Guruji's lecture
- 2) Gopichand was nice, everything else was not
- 3) I got to hear Gopichand Sir, which remains the best lecture I attended in my entire life.
- 4) Worst - Guruji, Memorable - Gopichand, Best- Gender sensitization

- 5) Golkonda trip-definitely. Apex meets - nope, it's like they were promoting things they should be standing against. HSS wasn't that great. Mediocre and felt like
- 6) Kindergarten.
- 7) HV was really good. It helped me see a lot of different perspectives.
- 8) Icebreakers (Multiple times)
- 9) Handloom factory trip: 6 hours travel time, 30 minutes at the actual place

## Did the induction schedule help you in settling at a new place?

59 responses



Other comments by people:

- 1) I felt the schedule took too much of time, which made our later schedule more hectic. Assignments were more frequent, also exam dates were mismatched, which caused a bit of a hassle. Overall a cool idea but needs proper management.
- 2) Please, please vet your apex better. It's a good concept, but it was very badly implemented. The wrong people were chosen. Remove the ice breakers, they're pointless. Add a few more debate club events,

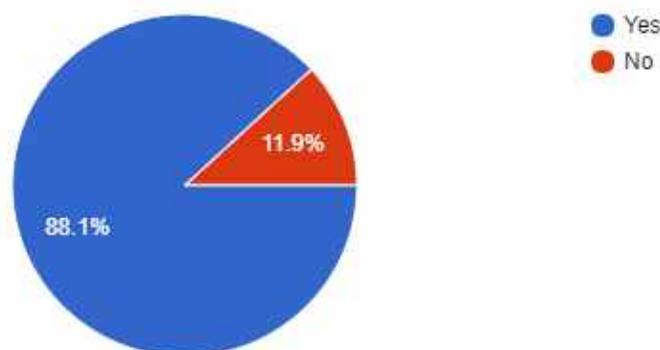
book club events, etc. Basically, make it a bit more interesting.

- 3) Add a section about the professors' interviews and something about this ragging program and anonymous views on it so that alongside those who oppose it, those who support it can also voice their opinions.

- 4) Safety rules should be put in place for the orientation trip (especially for those who fail to get the difference between the value of life and the value of a selfie).

## Did it help you in getting to know your batch-mates?

59 responses



## Final Words - In Comparison

Mahathi Vempati

The induction schedule before this constituted of activities and meetings in the evenings, and freshers practice sessions in the nights, while having classes during the day. HV and HSS were semester long courses. The exams aligned with the rest of the college.

If one were to compare and analyse the two schedules - The UG2k17 batch spent most of their first three weeks in some or the other activity mingling with each other, and the lack of academic load helped them bond even more. The previous batches however, did bond with each other over a longer period of time. The new schedule gave people the opportunity to socialise when they were most enthusiastic to.

HV is a course that cannot be done all at once. Given that the course aims to develop values and emotional intelligence skills, it is a useful course when one discusses something in class, and reflects about it during their usual routine, and puts what they learn against the real life events they experience, and then comes back to share things in class. One of the key elements to this process taking place properly is time. When done in one stretch, HV is more likely to be an abstract discussion easily forgotten.

One also misses out on discussing several things that occur only if you take a long enough stretch of time (interesting things in the news, changes in the student schedules, and so on). It may have been a good bonding experience, and maybe even slightly more

enthusiastic because it was done at a time when people were more open-minded and not filled with biases handed over by the seniors, but whether it had the lasting impact the course aims to have is debatable.

The time element holds for HSS as well. Previously, students had one skill that they picked up and practised under the instructor for a semester. And those who were interested, did the work sincerely and had good instructors, had more to take away from HSS than a few paintings and sculptures in terms of the thinking process that particular art had to offer. The HSS in the current induction schedule was mostly about trying new things (5 different courses in 3 weeks), bonding, and maybe selecting the course you would want to pick in the next semester. Not so much about developing a skill.

The new schedule has the advantage of not making the first year students plunge into academics from the moment they entered college, and even though from the suggestions it looked like some people would have preferred academics, it was a great idea to make people explore the non-academic side of college free of burdens. It takes quite a bit of effort and interest to do so once academics start.

Like some of the first year students suggest, a shorter induction schedule while having HV and HSS continue through the semester might have been a better option. Changes need to be made in the quality and content of the talks as well. It is great that the college put a lot of effort and thought into making the best out of the first few days for the freshers, and we look forward to having better induction schedules each year by taking feedback from the students. □



Credits: Vijayraj S.

# Research Ethics and Why IIIT Needs to Catch Up

Shreedhar Manek

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www.glasbergen.com



**“We need to draw the line on unethical behavior.  
But let’s draw it with an Etch-a-Sketch and  
don’t be afraid to shake it a little.”**

## Introduction

Picture this. It’s a conference where your paper has been published. There is a researcher presenting his paper in front of a curious audience, as he proudly proclaims - *This will be useful in making mass surveillance systems more effective!* There are a few muffled gasps, but besides that, people don’t bat an eye.

This was the experience of a student from IIIT attending a conference in Japan. He was struck by the obliviousness, intentional or otherwise, on the part of the researcher and his unconcerned pride in his research.

His experience raises many questions. What are the consequences of our research? Are we aware of the consequences at all? Are we responsible for how our research may be used? If so, to what extent? These questions are but the tip of an iceberg. The most important question for us, however, is—are we, as researchers at IIIT, cognizant of these questions and do we put an effort towards self regulation?

## Consequences of Research

While it goes without saying that research in some fields has apparent dangers—anything nuclear, for example—research in computer science comes off as relatively harmless. But the extent of research in computer science has now crossed a point where it of must be taken seriously and researchers must put a conscious effort into recognizing the (un)intended uses of their research.

Take Facebook’s machine learning algorithms that analyze user data and essentially represent each of its billion users as a cumulation of whatever they have

shared on their platform. Think about it this way, they can compress people’s personas on the basis of their data and form a fairly accurate individual representation.

The benefits of such a representation are undeniable. The auto tagging in pictures, helping the visually impaired use Facebook or a better newsfeed are all benefits.

But how safe is such a representation? For all practical purposes, Facebook’s data is the US government’s data, which the US uses to profile people all around the world, curtail essential freedoms and subvert human rights.

Another example of benign sounding research that can be dangerous is that of user engagement research. Products are designed today in order to be overly addictive. User engagement is one thing, but trying to ensure that every move that a user makes online stimulates a certain section of the brain and releases certain chemicals that all but ensures that people are drawn towards the product, is another. It is essentially identifying people’s weaknesses and exploiting them. An example of this would be the drag to refresh option on most apps in mobile phones. It gets people to manually refresh even though it doesn’t serve any practical purpose as most apps update their content automatically.

## Data Collection

Data collection is an important and essential facet of research. Whenever anything is uploaded on Facebook, that’s exactly what is happening from the side of a researcher at Facebook—collection of data.

While Facebook probably has a convoluted terms of service that users supposedly reads and consent to, and while that may not be ethical by itself, the data collection takes a slippery slope when it comes to an independent researcher from a university. The reason being that there is usually not an implicit consent for data that is collected and it must be explicitly sought as when data is collected and/or used.

The article *Data and IIIT*, in last year’s April issue of *Ping*, highlighted a few cases of data being collected and used for research without consent. Between then and now, little seems to have changed. There has not been an official response from the concerned faculty members or the administration, nor has there been, other than an inconsequential open session on privacy, any significant push from the side of the students to get answers.

## Understanding of Research Ethics in IIIT

Recently, there was a paper titled *Unsupervised*

Credits: XKCD comic by Randall Munroe



Learning Based Approach for *Plagiarism Detection in Programming Assignments* published in ISEC'17 that used programming assignments of IIT students in order to propose a better approach to detect plagiarism in programming assignments. There was no consent given in the collection of these assignments. Apart from comments, code may not have explicit identifiers tying to the author, but a little consent is always appreciated. Attempts to reach out to Jitendra Yasaswi, the first author of the paper requesting for information about the collection of the dataset, were unfruitful. Questions to a researcher about their paper are usually welcomed and graciously answered, often publicly. However, that was not the case here. In some ways, this is against the spirit of research, where a researcher closes themselves to questions from the general public.

Apart from advisors doing so of their own accord, there is no institutional mechanism to ensure that researchers are aware of any ethical code with respect to their research. Even the much criticized Human Values course in the first and second year students do not touch upon research ethics.

Those who are aware of the details of the recent Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal will know that this a problem not just with IIT but with researchers all around the world. Aleksander Kogan, a psychology lecturer at Cambridge University, is accused to have shared academic data obtained from Facebook with Cambridge Analytica, the company using them for the purposes that it did. But is using Facebook data of unsuspecting users for academic purposes ethical in the first place?

In IIT itself, there are talks of a lab potentially getting access to Aadhaar biometric data for research. Such research may or may not be legal depending on the Aadhaar Act and various past and future Supreme Court judgements, but considering the controversy surrounding Aadhaar and its forced implementation,

how ethical can such research be considered to be, even if deemed legal?

It must also be noted that most projects in universities are funded by the industry. With such sensitive data involved, would it be a Cambridge Analytica-like scandal waiting to happen?

## The Elusive Ethics Committee

The recent intranet overhaul saw a lot of official documents being updated. Among these was also a document titled *Institute Committees, Structures & Responsibilities*. This document is updated as recently as the 9th of September, 2017 and lists all the committees on campus along their responsibilities. However, a research ethics committee does not find a place in this document.

Prof. Vasudeva Varma, Dean (Research) was contacted and asked if such a committee exists. He replied in the affirmative and mentioned—"The process is that the principal investigator has to make a case before the committee (about the aspects you have mentioned - how data has to be collected, how it is processed etc) and the committee examines the ethical aspects, debates and determines whether the okay the project or not." However, when asked if instances of student data usage mentioned in *Data and IIT* constituted a breach of this process, we did not receive a reply.

The problem lies herein—based on the reply received, the ethics committee does not seem to have a single permanent member\* that can be contacted or consulted. There is little a member of the general public can do even if they discover a case of research misconduct or concerning research. All prominent institutions that conduct research have an easily accessible ethics guidelines webpage and an ethics committee that ensures that rules are followed. Carnegie Mellon University, which is informally considered to be IIT's mentor institute, has an Office of Research Integrity and Compliance with an easy to access webpage with several ethical categories ranging from Human Subject Research to Responsible Conduct Research.

## Final Words

In their last FSIS as a batch, UG4 expressed their concerns regarding the number of humanities courses that CS and EC students have to complete in order to fulfill their graduation requirements. The main response to this, that was summed up by an article that Prof. Jayanthi later shared, was this—the humanities are important so that the next generation of computer scientists are socially aware in order to enable them to work on things that matter, and not just the things that make money.

Ethics guidelines and a more visible ethics committee should help too. □

\* As has been informed - The committee should comprise of - Member Secretary, Internal Subject Expert, Medical Doctor and Representative of General Public

# Not the Pretentious College Reviews

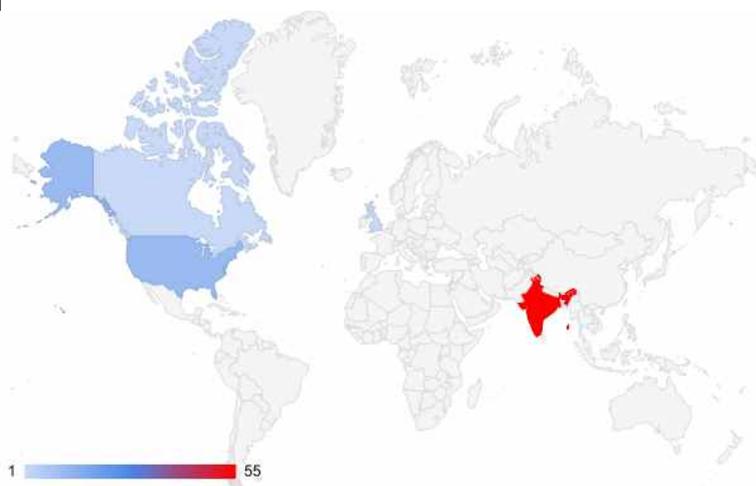
Zubair Abid  
Abhigyan Ghosh  
Deepti Mahesh

What would your reaction be if we told you that our college was planning to ban celebrating birthday parties in hostel rooms? What if sporting a French beard was now against the college rules? Sounds weird? Surprisingly enough, there exist colleges in our very own country that boast of tons of weird, funny, and downright messed up rules such as paying fines for low marks and irregular attendance. Even the act of “shaking hands with members of the opposite gender for more than 3 seconds” has been deemed a punishable offence.

We were interested in comparing how fucked up our college is relative to other colleges so that we can wallow in self-pity or laugh depending on what the basis for comparison is.

So in short, we’re stacking our college up against a bunch of universities and colleges from across the globe (primarily from India though) to see just how much we can succeed in destroying our happiness and peace of mind. We’ll be comparing across categories: namely, Academic and Social. That the latter even exists is a pleasant surprise we attribute to the addition of VIT to our comparison list.

We’ve surveyed a bunch of colleges from India and abroad - responses from 55 colleges in India and 14 abroad with a total of 118 people who took part in the survey. The data we gathered was interesting, but even more so were the brutally honest opinions that we received from people, some thought-provoking and some which are downright hilarious. Just to grab your attention, we present an infographic: a map of the world coloured by number of responses from various countries.



## The Data

At this point, we should establish some credentiality, namely the process followed in obtaining and verifying the data that shall follow. All of the data was collected via a survey: a Google form sent to friends in various institutions with request to further redistribute. All in all, about 118 responses were recorded from 69 distinct colleges. The survey contained questions across various categories asking about the degree of freedom afforded to the respondent by the college. Oftentimes it was according to how they perceived the freedom; and as a result, the data is not strictly objective. But then again, inherent subjectivity is part and parcel of personal perception.

In order to verify the data, we took a two-pronged approach: for every institute with 3 or more distinct individual respondents, the mode of responses in each subcategory is taken to be the situation on ground; and for any fewer, manual cross-checking was done. As such, the data is more or less comprehensive and verified. And while it is a tad too small for any significant statistical analysis, it serves its purpose better than mere anecdote.

## Where we stand

It should be noted that we are not trying to establish our college as “the worst decision ever”. Since we’re just trying to measure as a relative, a meaningful comparison needs to be made against some standard. Now again, given the wide variance of data, this is simply not possible. Hence comparison shall be made (as and when applicable) as follows:

The general state of college level education, nationwide.

Other ‘elite’ Indian colleges, like the IITs.

Colleges outside India, like Harvard or MIT.

And last; and most importantly - we shall hold the Institute’s current situation against the standard that we, the student body (or at least, the heavily biased Author(s) and instigating Editors), hold dear.

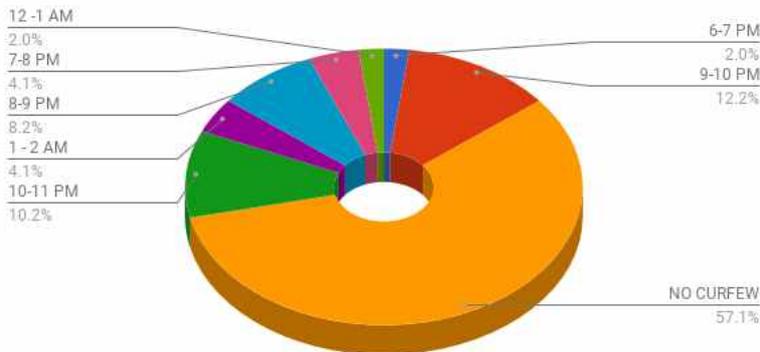
## Social Life

### Curfew Timings

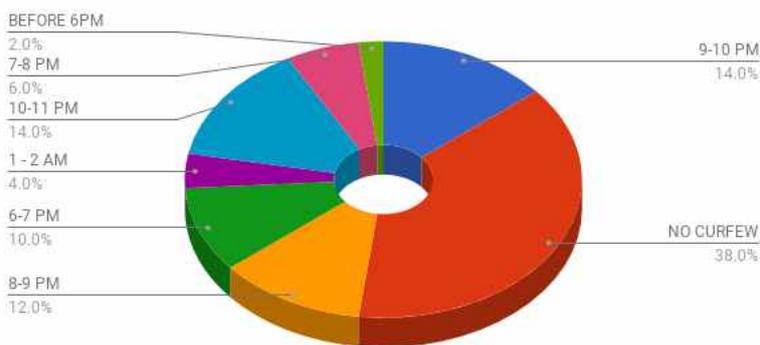
Perhaps the most contentious social issue consistently raised and argued, especially in our present Indian environment, is the existence of curfew - be it the hostels, the campus, the severe disbalance between in-time requirements for boys and girls, the change in policy within the institutes themselves depending on the whims and fancies of the wardens, and the relative laxity afforded to boys in that regard too; there exist a

plethora of topics for everyone to weigh in on.

Curfew Times for Boys in India



Curfew Timings for Girls in India



## India

While an alien concept to most of us, most Indian colleges seem to have rather restrictive expected in-times for their students. On top of that, colleges with such curfews usually exhibit a gender disparity in the matter, with the Girls' timings being often one or two, sometimes three hours before the one imposed on Boys - if one is imposed on the boys to begin with. For an extreme case of Hostel Timings, consider Lovely Professional University - Women must report back to hostels by 7:30 pm in summers, and 6.30 in winters; for men, the timings are 8 pm throughout the year.<sup>1</sup>

### The Indian 'Elite'

Other than IIT BHU, none of the the IITs report any curfew (note that in some cases the publicly available official policy says otherwise, so either there is no strict enforcement or policy has changed). In the case of BHU, there is no reported curfew time for boys, but it ranges from 9-11 PM for girls. Moving onto BITS Pilani: only the Hyderabad campus reports a curfew time (of around 2 AM) for both genders. BIT Mesra has a curfew that changes by hostel, but the

girls' hostels have a strict in-time of 9 PM. Upon further investigation, it was found that some wardens in the Boys' hostel ignore the curfew. Either way, it is only enforced for first year students. Other colleges like CMI and Ashoka have similar rules to IIIT.

## IIIT

On this regard, IIIT is very liberal and is, in fact, one of the most relaxed colleges out there, even when considered internationally. Very few other colleges appear to give students the freedom to leave campus as and when they desire.

### Level of Freedom of Gender Interaction

AKA Neighbourhood Aunty Watch. Common sense would dictate that, as young adults waiting to be released into the world, college students should, at the very least, have the freedom to interact with those of the opposite sex - to ensure proper communicative faculty, if nothing else. Sanskaar says otherwise.

## India

You'd think it couldn't get worse than in VIT, where, as a survey respondent said, "You can't shake hands for more than 3 seconds", but you'd be wrong. There exist colleges (like Satyabhama University in Chennai) where any form of interaction in between boys and girls is forbidden - so much so that many of them have separate staircases for boys and girls "so that they don't have to look at each other while leaving the premises." In Panimalar Institute of Technology, cellphones are allowed but 'romantic' ringtones are banned. According to the warden, romantic ringtones might evoke 'romantic' feelings in students.<sup>2</sup>

### The Indian 'Elite'

None of the IITs recorded any negative response to the question - every one of them is claimed to be at least neutral, if not positive, on freedom of gender Interactions. This trend is echoed in CMI, Ashoka, all the NITs surveyed to some extent, and even Manipal.

## IIIT

Here, too, IIIT fares really well. Aside from a lack of co-ed hostels as there exist in several IITs, CMI, Ashoka, and various other Indian colleges (without considering any abroad). It is on par with the best in India and miles above most in the country. One place where it's lacking is in hostel entry for members of the opposite sex. Then again, it's not too bad - all the messes and canteens are mixed, and the girls' and boys' hostels aren't separated by a forest as they are in BIT Mesra.

### Restriction on Dresses

You know you're in the right college when the dress code becomes more important than the education they have promised to impart.

The 'dress code' is a major point of discussion,

especially amongst Indian families and as extensively seen during the Induction Schedule Faculty-Parent interaction sessions. As students, the majority of us have worn uniforms for all of our years of schooling, and college is a fresh breath of air.

The primary arguments brought forth in defence of dress codes/uniforms in colleges are: ensuring that students wear a 'decent dress' and look 'professional'. There exists obvious counterpoints to both of these arguments, neither of which will be covered here, for the fear of digressing.

## India

Many local colleges still enforce a strict line which you cannot cross on what you can wear to your college each day. No shorts, no sleeveless shirts, no skirts for girls, etc. Because god forbid, someone shows their bare leg for the world to see. Christ still somehow manages to enforce such fuckall rules on what their students wear. It's 2018, guys. SRM KTR, PES, St. Xavier's (Kolkata) are some other examples.

## Elite and Outside

Dress restrictions are a thing of the past when it comes to the IITs, BITS and even the NITs. It remains non-existent in almost all colleges abroad. Even in VIT, dress restrictions are minimum if not present at all.

## IIIT

It suffices to say we have no restrictions when it comes to what we wear in IIIT. We are more than good in this category. Yes, we're talking about the most of us who roll out of bed, attend classes and go back to bed. Of course it doesn't require you to change into a new set of clothes. Minimum effort. Sweatpants and shorts for the win.

## Academics

### Attendance Requirement

The alarm blares and you drag yourself out of bed. It does not matter how sick you are. It does not matter how much you wanted to compete in that basketball tournament or participate in that cultural event which you've thought about for weeks. You cannot afford to miss any class. '85% attendance', these words haunt you every day.

Reforming regulations pertaining to attendance has been a long debated topic, complete with a large variety of slurs aimed at the teaching staff and the administrative system and more often than not, at the unfortunate soul who agreed to proxy but ultimately failed to do it. (You had but one job!)

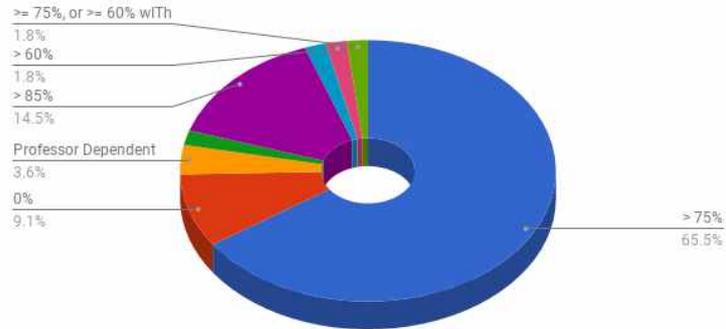
As most of us are aware (like a cloud of doom hanging over our heads) along with poor performance in exams, grades can decrease by as much as a full letter without (or in spite of) proper excuses of absences.<sup>3</sup>

## India

Many Indian institutes have followed the same too

and the not so well recognized: IISER Mohali). Many cases (Ashoka, Northwestern, CMI, IIT Kanpur) have compulsory attendance whose percentage changes from course to course and usually entirely up to the professor in charge.

Attendance Requirement in Indian Colleges

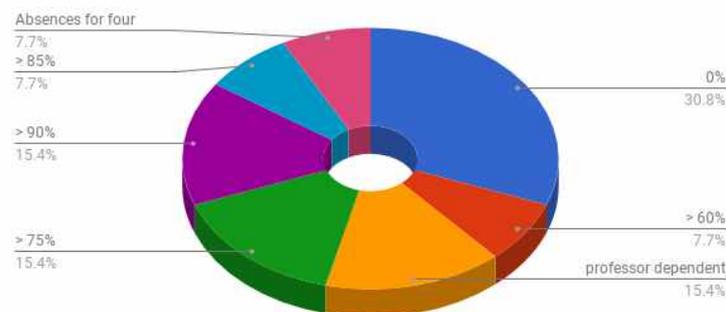


## Outside

Most foreign colleges have set a precedence of 0% attendance policy, ie, the system does not punish you for what you choose to do that day (Cornell, MIT, University of Cambridge). The consequences, of course, are dealt by yourself and the system does not take any fault for it.

On the other hand, there's the University of Dallas, Texas which maintains that absences for four consecutive classes result in a failure of the course.

Attendance Requirement in Colleges Abroad



## IIIT

Back here in IIIT, we'd like to hear about colleges which are worse off than us and so here's the truth: It's pretty hard to beat us in this area but surprisingly there are people who do suffer more than us. Here's one such example:

When left to the professors, the attendance policy can get pretty bleak. IIT Kanpur, Vassar have reported instances of professors enforcing a hellish 90% minimum.

## Academic Freedom

### Majors and Minors - Option to switch major

Choosing a major in college still remains a crucial turning point and a hard decision which mostly cannot be revisited, dooming you to four or five (or many, many more) years of studying in a field which you have zero interest in. Conventional thinking of what a particular major entails is usually wrong leading to misled choices.

Maybe you want to change majors at your existing school. Perchance you are planning ahead, or you are just curious about your options. Or maybe you just can't and you have no choice.

#### India

Most colleges including IIT Kanpur, IIT Kharagpur, Ashoka University, Arena Animation, SP Jain School Of Global Management (Mumbai), etc allow their students to switch majors quite easily.

Some colleges need prerequisite conditions including a spectacular GPA in first year (BITS Pilani) to switch. But changing majors involve too much hassle in many colleges.

#### Outside

All the universities we surveyed abroad have this in common: Changing majors is a piece of cake and not unusual at all.

### Majors and Minors - Miscellaneous

Choosing a minor leads to a more well-rounded education and especially helps when switching to another major. Moreover it adds to one's expertise in the field they choose to study in.

But do all colleges see it this way? Many colleges have a rigid (if not utterly set in stone) course structure and no option at all to choose a professor for the course. They cannot choose a minor (KIIT University, most medical colleges, etc), and many do not even have the freedom to construct their own timetable.

#### India

One of the very few colleges when it comes to Academic Freedom is BITS Pilani. They provide students the ability to fast-track and double-major.

#### Outside

Much more freedom regarding course structure, and many more options to choose and update majors, and learn under a professor of your choosing.

#### IIIT

Pretty good, considering there is little to no option for a formal branch change. Not many options beyond CS and related subjects, though. Timetable usually can't be

messed with.

### Internet Access

Surveys showed a firm 'Yes' when it came to internet access within college except when it came to some few sad colleges (Jadavpur University, Meghnad Saha, etc). But does it really count if there are a countless restrictions on them?

1 GB a day for students may seem as a lot but in any college which masquerades as a technological institution, unlimited internet access remains a boon and should be mandatory.

#### India

Ashoka University, Manipal Institute of Technology, Arena Animation etc allows only the use of 1GB per day. VIT, has managed to lose in this category too, by allowing for only 10 GB per month.

BITS Pilani, IISER Pune, IIT Kanpur, PES University have all reported blocking of certain sites including porn and torrent. Lady Shri Ram College For Women have only half the campus WiFi enabled. St. Xavier's in Kolkata has "capped internet speed to the order of 100 kbps".

#### Outside

For all the colleges we surveyed abroad, none of the colleges reported any restriction on bandwidth or time of usage when it came to Internet access.

#### IIIT

One of the only disadvantages faced is the fact that there is no WiFi access at the hostels. Otherwise, except for first year students, everyone gets internet access through ethernet ports.

## Conclusion

After an attempted neutral data analysis of 118 responses from 69 colleges, we have done our best at presenting a semi-formal, possibly biased conclusion on restrictions imposed across various categories by colleges across the world. And a comparison of ours against them. And - to be honest - it isn't that bad. Sure, the assignments suck our souls and PT/Yoga has resulted in serious sleep deficiency for a significant portion of the college; but IIT Kanpur has PT at 6 as well and we're nothing compared to MIT (Massachusetts) when it comes to assignments. As students of the college we're luckier than most and unluckier than some. And there isn't really much to do but to accept the situation as is and strive to improve it as far as possible. □

### Citations

- 1) <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/bhu-students-protest-jnu-the-campus-lines-4869005/>
- 2) <https://www.indiatimes.com/culture/who-we-are/9-ridiculous-college-and-hostel-rules-that-will-make-you-pull-out-your-hair-in-frustration-244348.html>
- 3) <http://www.thetimeliners.com/christ-university-and-6-other-indian-colleges-absurd-attendance-requirements>

# Let's Transcend Gender!

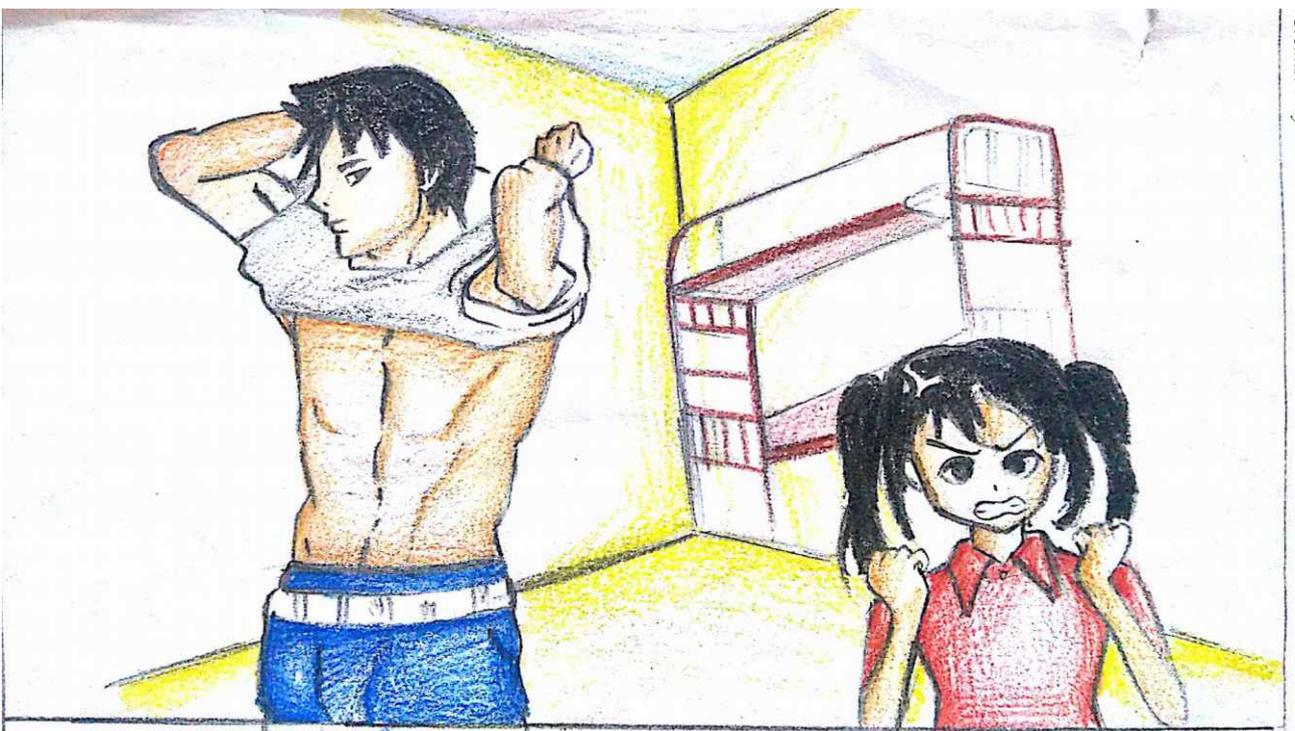
## Case in Point: Hostels

Credits: Priyank Modi and Neel Trivedi



Status quo - gendered hostels

Credits: Priyank Modi and Neel Trivedi



There is a notion that open hostels will automatically bring in several problems. But is that necessarily the case?

# Part I: Co-ed Hostels; What do they Imply



Kripa Anne  
Shelly Jain

It's a usual Wednesday morning in college. You wake up, groggy from last night's deadline and subsequent gaming marathon, dodge all the guys who thought it'd be a cool idea to get drunk on a weekday, and enter the washrooms to try and take a shower before class, only to get shoved out of the way by a girl, because "Can't you see the line, bro?" And to top it all off, this isn't a novelty for you. In fact, you're quite accustomed to living with a bunch of girls, as are they, with you.

But let's skip the banter and get right down to the 'dirty' details - sex. Funnily enough, it's been one of the prime arguments for and against the concept of co-ed hostels. Over time, we've heard a lot of opinions on this, spanning from rainbow-toned liberals preaching harmony to ignorant college administrators remarking that they'd need to set up maternity wards. But let's not get ahead of ourselves here, and fix some of our concepts. A shared living space doesn't elicit sex, romance or even the blinding misery of unrequited love. For starters, co-ed hostels don't magically transcend the prerequisites of attraction and more importantly, consent. The age-old problems of privacy, uncooperative roommates, too-loud music and unexpected nudity are still going to be problems - and it's going to be just as difficult to get to know someone, despite the proximity. Besides, staying in a co-ed hostel could get rid of all the stigma and mystery surrounding sex and can actually lead to better understanding of how it's rather more about identity and choice. At the end of the day, we are all legal adults who, at this point in time, should be both mature and independent enough to be trusted with making decisions for ourselves. We are responsible for our own lives, and our activities are really of no concern to

anyone else; any mistakes made are for us to face, without censure, humiliation, or baseless criticism from uninvolved spectators.

There are also a lot of well-intentioned but ultimately ill-informed worries about the 'comfort' of the students themselves. People are concerned that the students, so accustomed to the idea of their own gender, may experience discomfort when faced with the reality that they would share living space with other students who are 'unlike' them. This view fails to take into account the opinions of the students themselves. Contrary to the general perspective, there are actually quite a few students who may prefer to live with roommates whose gender is not the same as their own, be it due to habit, trauma or even simple desire for a new experience. In fact, most students, when given the option, choose co-ed hostels over those segregated by sex. No matter what the public seems to believe, the only thing preventing the spread of co-ed hostels is not the sentiments of the students, but their own inability to broaden their minds.

Moving to a wider perspective, the blind labelling and categorisation of students is also extremely insensitive towards the individuals of the LGBTQ+ community. When a person is clumped together with a more widely accepted 'standard', so to speak, it is disrespectful on the part of the one judging, as their initial assumptions may be way off the mark. For individuals whose situations cause them to be alienated on a regular basis, such labels are extremely stifling. Misgendering a person, especially on purpose (when one denies the truth) is very uncomfortable, and downright oppressive for those who do not identify with the sex assigned to them. Even worse would be when the student feels



Contrary to popular belief, open hostels are likely to be better for all of us.

alienated from both of the 'options' offered to them. When the student is forced to confine themselves within the narrow world view which refuses to accept them for themselves, this oppression can only be eased by offering them a haven without labels to fall back on. As co-ed hostels do not segregate on the basis of sex - or, for that matter, the two publicly accepted sexes - it is not necessary to provide moulds within which students may have to confine themselves; instead, there is freedom for all students to live their lives without the burden of forcing a fit into less than comfortable social moulds. And tolerance among students. Living with someone of another gender can open your eyes to the issues faced by them and give you a deeper understanding of their lives while also becoming more comfortable around them.

Also, more than merely understanding one-another, sharing living space with other genders broadens our access to new ideas and fresh perspectives. Even within colleges like ours, it is an unspoken truth that when it is time for some project, the girls will always be at a disadvantage. With gender-segregated hostels limiting the number of areas where students may collaborate, this very actively discourages different genders from working together. Not only does this constrain people to a very narrow scope of thought, but it also limits the exchange of a fresh set of skills, which may not be accessible otherwise. With co-ed hostels drastically increasing the areas available for people to work, the activities themselves show a more even distribution of participants, and the unhindered communication coupled with a hub of new ideas proves synergic to innovation in all forms.

According to Lise Eliot, a leading neuroscientist and author, separating groups by gender inevitably affects the way we perceive each other and ourselves. Bringing different genders under the same roof, free to interact with each other, is the first step to dismantling

the divide that is reflected in educational institutions across India. The genders do not differ fundamentally in personality, cognitive ability or leadership skills; everyone starts off on the same level, equally assertive and competitive, but over the years, social conditioning and gender-specific grouping enforces the differences that are apparent later on. Co-ed hostels could help abolish these stereotypes and provide equal access to opportunities for all.

Universities and educational institutions all over the world claim to place as much importance on the Holistic development of a student as on their purely Academic and intellectual growth. But contrary to what they want to believe, almost all real education takes place outside the confines of cramped classrooms and poorly ventilated lecture halls. Conversation stimulates thought, which fosters creativity and curiosity, and introduces you to things you've never heard of and ideas you never fathomed. While it's unclear, and frankly, irrelevant, whether different genders think differently, interactions between them can only deepen our understanding of each other. Especially when taken in context of institutes where the gender ratio is skewed in a particular direction, introducing the concept of co-ed hostels, where there are no restrictions on different genders being in the same living area, brings a student into contact with a lot more people. It helps integrate the student community better and avoid alienation or exclusion of any student from a social activity based solely on their gender.

Co-ed hostels aren't as far-fetched as they sound. Shared living areas have been a tabled proposal for years and now more than ever, with the rising public consciousness about LGBTQ+ rights and dismantling of archaic and irrelevant stereotypes, it is closer to reality.

# Part II: A Case for Co-ed Hostels at IIT

Neelesh Agrawal

## The OBH Bias

The suggestion that there is an “OBH bias” in IIT was put forward in a Ping boardroom meeting nearly a year and a half ago, by a female student who had then been in the college for over 4 years, and while the bias has slightly fallen over the years, it still stands relevant today. The idea was that the bulk of the student community lives in OBH, a male-exclusive domain, and this closely knit male majority affects all student activities and decision-making on campus. But I’m getting ahead of myself.



*Credits: Steven Crowder, another smug conservative*

The OBH bias itself is twofold; academic and campus life related.

### Academic

We have team projects as early as the second semester. The girls are naturally excluded from these assignment and project teams by the boys, except of course, the occasional couple in a relationship.

I’m not blaming the boys here, the bias here is natural and predictable, enforced only by the structures in place. When most of the boys have the convenience to just go to each other’s hostel rooms and work together, while also being able to play some music and snack their way through their work, why indeed would they want to consider the other option. The gross inconvenience of working with a girl in such a set up is not as exaggerated as it may seem.

While the stuffy reading room and open labs are

options, (however inconvenient, but options nonetheless), they’re only available till midnight. The late hours, there is almost no way for them to work, and when deadlines approach, the teams NEED those late working hours! This then leads to rumours on persons sneaking into someone else’s lab, girls sneaking into OBH and what not, but can you really blame them?

A lack of convenient open spaces certainly hurts the female population of our college, and in turn the academic environment itself, where good collaboration may be limited due to gender. Of course, one suggested solution was to construct convenient open working spaces for students. However, there has been too much red tape involved in getting it done, and more importantly, working spaces could never offer the convenience of living spaces. Furthermore, the idea is not simply to provide a better space to work, but also a better space for group study, shared thinking, and in general, better exchange of ideas and opinions, not limited by gender. As the Dean(A) herself has said on record, “education in a residential campus happens continuously, whether it is in a classroom, lab, **hostel**, canteen or wherever.” Clearly, introducing co-ed hostels is still the better solution.

### Campus Life

As a senior student once explained, many decisions, especially related to Felicity, were made in a room in the OBH, where a group of drunk male students distributed responsibilities among themselves conveniently. Sometimes, there were pseudo-meetings where proxy discussions would happen, but then the final decisions would still be made in yet another OBH room, by yet another male group.

Female representation in club events has largely been negligible. In a recent play by Abhivyakti, only one out of the 8-10 actors was female. The TV Room Quiz Club is somehow a male-exclusive club. It may be no surprise that a club that has its origins in the TV room of, ahem, OBH, is male-exclusive, but the club has grown far beyond that, and to the credit of the present club, they are themselves making efforts to have more female participation. Yet, it may be difficult to move beyond what has been established from the OBH bias of the past.

Besides clubs, girls have forever been under-represented as well as misrepresented in the Parliament. Hostel is one of the major agenda points for the candidates, and the fact that girls can represent a mere 15-20% of this agenda automatically hurts their votes. This is still one of the minor factors. While

campaigning for their candidature, male students do so at OBH, hence covering a much larger target group than the female students can.

The only bunch of events that don't seem to suffer from this bias are cultural events where the practices are usually conducted outside of hostels. And this is not limited to injustice to the female population of IIIT; in excluding them from campus life, we're also excluding a broad range of perspectives and opinions, and in turn causing injustice, period. A co-ed hostel environment could certainly bring justice to this scenario.

## Gender Understanding, Relationships and Co-ed Hostels

Quite recently, there was a Facebook post by a male student of IIIT, regarding some PT credits rule that seemed, to him, biased towards the female population of college. The student met with a rather unanimous bashing and shaming from the female population of the college, over not understanding how menstruation affects their participation in PT. However, it was clearly not something so strikingly obvious to that particular student. The co-ed hostel environment would naturally lead to a better understanding of genders in general.

The institute itself has appointed a Gender Sensitization Committee and also organised gender diversity workshops to bridge this gap. However, the institute must also practice what it preaches. Gender-segregated hostels have no place in a world free of gender biases; and are in fact only a product of gender biases. As the institute moves towards a gender-sensitive environment, introduction of co-ed hostels should be an obvious step in the process. Otherwise, the many implicit claims over how these efforts of the institute are simply a PR exercise will only find more credit.

As elaborated in part 1, co-ed hostels are somehow synonymous with open sex for most people. However, as already explained in the Coupling Decoupling

article of the November 2017 issue of Ping, yes, relationships and sex are a real thing in college. A lack of acceptance never made anything disappear, but only more contrived and odd, as was implicit in that article. Quoting from part 1 of this article, "staying in an co-ed hostel could get rid of all the stigma and mystery surrounding sex and can actually lead to better understanding of how it's rather more about identity and choice".

## Steps at Hand and Final Words

A simple theoretical claim that co-ed hostels are going to be revolutionary is not enough. That just makes it a thing for the distant future; but this is not the case. I'm not saying that we can switch to co-ed hostels overnight; they should only be introduced phase-wise, but the first step leading to it may actually be taken up immediately. This first step should be to allow free entry for students of all genders to all the hostels. This itself will reduce much of the bias that we have discussed above. In fact, this simple thing has been in place at IIT Gandhinagar for years now.<sup>2</sup>

**A**s far as co-education goes, IIT-Gandinagar is the place to be. Here, the usual restrictions for girls and boys from entering each other's hostels don't exist. At IIT-Gn, both the sexes are allowed into each other's hostel rooms. IIT-Gn director Prof Sudhir



K Jain says the institute perhaps has the most liberal policies when it comes to hostels. "We don't believe in chaining our girl students. We want to give them freedom... We've 100% faith in their conduct," said Jain while addressing delegates from more than 50 industries from all over India at the institute's first industry open house on August 23. Prof Jain added, "We allow both the sexes into each other's rooms... provided the boy doesn't shift permanently to the girl's room. We've absolutely no issues till other room occupants have no problem."

Credits: Times of India, 27/08/2014

Those who still think that co-ed hostels are a thing of the future, the future is now, and it's time that they catch up. Switching to co-ed hostels is an intuitive decision, and work should start in this direction. The only obstacles are a lack of awareness and a lack of effort. With the former addressed, the latter would soon be overcome. □

### Citations:

- 1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87yil4uo1yc>
- 2) <https://www.iitgn.ac.in/pdf/TOI-27-08-14.pdf>



While the institute is making efforts towards gender awareness, it must also practice what it preaches. Credits: IIIT social media team

# Autonomous Cars: A Developing Challenge

Zubair Abid, Abhigyan Ghosh

“There are always those who argue that government should stay out of free enterprise entirely, but I think most Americans would agree we still need rules to keep our air and water clean, and our food and medicine safe. That’s the general principle here. What’s more, the quickest way to slam the brakes on innovation is for the public to lose confidence in the safety of new technologies.”

- Barack Obama

44th President of The United States of America

Obama’s address while introducing regulations for self-driving cars in American roads covers a fundamental issue often overlooked in the hype and noise of self-driving cars - the legislative, sociological, economic and political outfall inevitable with such advances.

The fully autonomous vehicle has been a partially conceptualised pipe dream living in the realms of imagination and science fiction for the past century. From James Bond’s Aston Martin to Batman’s Batmobile, if a car isn’t autonomous, it is not futuristic enough. Now fast forward to the 21st century where we have ABS, cruise control, auto-transmission and driver assist technologies present in almost 80% of the cars that roll out of production lines all over the world. And these technologies are such an integral part of transportation today that we do not consider them to be consequential features to be marvelled at anymore. The aforementioned technologies comprise what is more popularly known as the Level 1 of autonomy<sup>[see end]</sup> in the field of autonomous technologies.

And we now exist in a time where the possibility of road legal autonomous vehicles within the next 20 years is a legitimate possibility; with some pundits claiming a figure of 10, or even 5 years from today. But the road to this dream is riddled with potholes: both the practical hindrances of actually getting such cars on the road, and the associated (presumably) wide-ranging socioeconomic changes associated with the possibility of a society that considers vehicular autonomy to be the norm.

## The Indian Scenario

“When driving, you should assume at all times that everyone around you is suffering from a severe mental disease that makes them either suicidal or homicidal.”

Neil Miller  
Web Journalist

Getting cars to drive themselves in the real world is considered to be a generally hard task - the machines have to account for the inconsistency inherently associated with an imperfectly modelled world. An autonomous car has to take decisions continuously



The training and testing of this car is a common sight at college.

Credits: Zubair Abid

and anticipate the decisions of other agents on the road- artificial or human. This is a rather tall task for systems which currently require tons of data for even basic pattern matching. The issue is amplified the closer one gets to India, because of the piss poor condition of Indian roads. Patterns of any form or shape are outliers rather than the norm - be it the potholes, the lack of proper marking of any form, the varied traffic, or the lack of roads altogether. On top of that, cows, camels, and squealing kids aren’t known to have a working knowledge of road regulations. Meanwhile, the mass of autos, buses, rickshaws, cycles, trucks, and the like aren’t particularly concerned about the existence of any such rule(s) either, consequently making the decision making problem harder.

And the issue is not just technical. India has economic issues. It has political underplay - a lot of it. There are social factors, biases, bases, and trends factoring heavily against the introduction of such vehicles on Indian roads. Situations to consider if such should eventually pass, including the effect on the common man - often in ways not immediately obvious.

## An Issue of Implementation:

“India will be the last one to get autonomous cars! Have you see the way people drive here?”

Travis Kalanick  
Former Uber Chief

There are some obvious problems with introducing autonomous vehicles in India - the lack of infrastructure, the economic situation, possible social backlash. There’s also the legal component - autonomous vehicles, as of the 25th of July 2017, have been outlawed by the Union Transport Minister. However, even excluding these issues which are better

classifiable as non-technical and logistical, there exist plenty other implementation details that are hard to get right across the world, and (very obviously) especially in India.

First up, consider the effect of and on telecommunications. The sector is integral to the growth of the autonomous vehicle industry. There is bound to be considerable growth in data consumption as autonomous vehicles require a lot of metadata that can be easily fetched from the internet - road traffic data, accident information, location data, local mapping, and so on.

In India, this turns out to be a very major issue. Large parts of the country lack proper network coverage, and among those that do, very few places are equipped with the high speed bandwidth requirement for such vehicles. Even metropolitan cities are rather poorly serviced when compared against the global standard. Just compare the definition for broadband - in the USA, the minimum download speed required for a network connection to be classified as broadband is 25 Mbps. That same requirement in India is 2Mbps.

Moreover, there is bound to be considerable growth in data consumption for autonomous vehicles that will communicate over mobile networks (utilising decision swarms, for example), and it is necessary to ensure constant access to telecommunication networks for the functioning of these cars. An electrical grid blackout or weather disruption at a busy intersection may have fatal consequences for said vehicles. On a smaller scale, any weakening of the network across a grid at dead zones may cause smaller, but equally fatal accidents.

A lot of foundational work has to be done before we can begin to look at self driving vehicles as a reasonable possibility on our roads - and the sheer quantity that remains to be done casts the oft projected figure of 20 years for the future to arrive in a shadow of doubt.

“*At some intersections, there will be a traffic signal. At times, there will also be electricity for the traffic signal.*”

*Neil Miller strikes again, the typical DASA way*

The other issue is with Computer Vision, or how the cars see. Perception is a complex problem, inferring and understanding the 3D world the car resides in from a set of cameras is not as trivial as it may seem. This subsystem of an autonomous car is currently powered by long and complex pipelines employing complicated neural networks on data taken from multiple modalities. Real world aids in this regard for the algorithms are road markings and signage, along with a consistent set of rules that are largely followed.

Seems simple enough, except when these start being major factors even in developed First World countries, you know it'll be worse in India. Several developers of autonomous vehicles have raised issues about the US's lack of consistent signage across wide stretches of its roads. Lack of such forces automakers to rely more heavily on (possibly old, inaccurate) maps and invest

into more expensive, sophisticated sensors and technology. Errors here are crippling and can be fatal: as in the case of the first known death caused by a self driving car - when the car sensors of a Tesla Model S failed to distinguish a large white 18 wheel truck against a bright spring sky.

“*People in Faridabad don't drive like the people in Frankfurt! Same goes for Calcutta and California or Mumbai and Miami.*”

*Anurag Ghosh  
We couldn't find anyone else*

And then we get to India. We've waxed enough about the situation of Indian roads - rather, the lack thereof - and the problem is trivially obvious. Current research datasets like KITTI are inadequate for training autonomous vehicles for India for precisely one reason - the road conditions are so different from US and European conditions. And this is only considering the perception part of the pipeline, the behavior of people who drive cars in India is unlike say, the French. The Indian fixation of “jugaad” extends itself to driving on roads - laws are lax and considered as suggestions; people cut corners, drive on pavements, skip signals if the intersection is not crowded, unlike drivers in first world countries.

Another thing not to be left out of consideration is the matter of replacing our current fleet of vehicles entirely with autonomous cars. It is highly unlikely that all of the world's, or even a locality's vehicles will be replaced at once - not even if the governing authority demands so. It's simply not a practical possibility, especially considering the economics of demand and supply and the current manufacturing throughput of conventional vehicles. What's more likely is a progressive change. This implies years of a dichotomy wherein both self driving and human driven vehicles would take to the road.

The situation gets rather socially complex: assuming they stand the test of time and abuse, self driving cars shall go from a minority on the road to the overwhelming majority; from the hated section of the road to the one that is unequivocally “right” by popular consensus. It's an interesting outcome to consider, if nothing else.

### The Outfall - Economic:

“*Today, you see millions of jobs are being created in the transport market by truckers and taxi aggregators. Such technology will make millions jobless. Maybe some years down the line we won't be able to ignore it but, as of now... we shouldn't allow it. The government platform will help get more people employment opportunities. The idea is in the primary stage but we're working on it seriously.*”

*Nitin Gadkari,  
Transport Minister of India  
On why Autonomous Vehicles wouldn't be allowed to  
ply on Indian roads*

Introducing driverless cars to an economy will

naturally bring along with it a range of effects. A large number of them not that immediately obvious - for instance, it is reasonable to assume that the cost of the individual car would go up, but in a scenario with Level 5 autonomy[see end], would owning a personal car make sense? In fact, when Uber was founded, co-founder Travis Kalanick's goal was not just to create a transportation app but to make car ownership obsolete. Achieving that would entail driving down the cost of Uber rides so that they are eventually cheaper than personal car ownership. Currently the cost of ride hailing services such as Uber and Lyft are twice that of using one's personal car. However, these economics are slated to dramatically reverse once driverless technologies become commonplace. It is entirely possible that owning a car may turn out not to be the economically sound thing to do in the face of hiring one from a service provider for periods of time; the economic shift may affect our ideas of personal ownership. If the situation seems to be a far cry, simply consider the Music, Television, and Movie industry: you may personally choose to buy all of it as it was conventionally sold, but does that really make sense to most in a world of Spotify, Netflix, and Amazon Prime subscriptions?

“*The Indian government isn't looking at the big picture when it puts the preservation of certain jobs ahead of the large-scale benefits of autonomous vehicles.*”

*Vivek Wadhwa  
Distinguished Fellow and Researcher at Carnegie Mellon University*

A potential fallout of autonomous vehicles often brought up is the matter of unemployment of labour as can be seen when considering those who drive for trucks and taxis. Among the first vehicles to be widely automated are these, in various countries around the world - as in Germany. Take away these professions, and you take away for many their only source of income, even more so because that particular skill set (driving) is overpopulated with a shrinking demand, as more and more people drive themselves instead of hiring drivers, and even this would be replaced by the cars driving themselves in this possible future being discussed. However, this is not that a trend that holds worldwide - in places like the U.S. for example, the trucking community is faced with a shortage of drivers with the average age of drivers being around fifty. Introduction of autonomous vehicles would actually help the transportation industry there. This is however not the case in India where people are dying for any job which will fetch them two square meals a day, despite long hours and job hazards.

A common response to the job wipe-out claims is that job loss is standard with every introduction of ground-breaking technology. One could consider the example of the Luddites of Britain in the early 19th century. As MIT Economist Erik Brynjolfsson said, “A lot of skilled artisans did lose their jobs,” but several decades later demand for labor rose as new job categories emerged, like office work. “Average wages have been increasing for the past 200 years,” he notes. “The machines were creating wealth!” Essentially, our view is rather limited when it comes to employment in case

of technological revolution, and as with that situation, here too it is not possible to predict the type and number of job opportunities the AI revolution would bring along with it. It's entirely possible that the number of jobs scoped out by the technology more than accounts for the unemployment outfall. However, if that doesn't turn out to be true, governments would need to turn to alternate options like Universal Basic Income (mentioned in a previous Eye to the Future article; *Affording Unemployment for All*, Ping Nov '16).

All said, such an argument does not account for a rather important factor: job skill mismatch. Consider excavator operators: it's a skilled job requiring specialised training that will be of no use anywhere else if machines take over the job; and machines are taking over - they're just better. The market has jobs for those who lose their employment, but does it have a job that fits? The new employment opportunities opened by autonomous vehicles may require either a higher, lower, or entirely different skill set from that possessed by those humans displaced by these technologies and reskilling may itself be a hard problem to scale for such a large population.

## The Outfall - Legal:

Bringing a new class of vehicles onto the road comes with a baggage of new legislation. Legislation that surrounds the matters of personal property, liability, insurance and safety measures. Different places have different laws regarding how vehicles should be driven - their speed, pollution level limit, lane usage, overtake laws, and the like. In the current situation, most of these aren't particularly followed, but an autonomous vehicle would be expected to do so to the dot as it can be “programmed”. But given a situation where a vehicle does follow all of these rules and still ends up in an accident or any other such predicament, the legal system would have to come up with methods to deal with it.

Consider matters of liability. When autonomous vehicles get involved in accidents, the issue of liability may get complicated as resolving the question of fault will require consideration of novel and challenging questions, considering that the “driver” of the car is no longer human, but rather software programmed by a lot of people working in tandem with other people writing more software or designing hardware for dedicated tasks. If one cog in the machine goes wrong, the natural instinct is to blame that individual responsible for the cog, but such judgements get complicated when it's a team working on something, possibly relying on work other people did.

A direct example of this would be seen in the effect on Insurance premiums. The extant test is to determine the driver's liability and adjudicate accordingly, but in cases where there is no driver and the car runs entirely with software assist, there need to be different parameters of consideration. Traditionally, the underwriting criteria for insurance companies depended on the number and kind of accidents an applicant has had, the miles they expected to drive, and

the place where the car is to be garaged. While some of these criteria would continue to apply, the make, model, style and the manufacturer of the car may assume greater importance. In the driverless future, actuaries may have to replace calculations about individuals with issues such as hacking of cars, analyzing which parts of the country have better satellite imagery etc. They will also have to identify the difference in quality of the safety features across driverless cars.

In fact, given that autonomous vehicles promise to improve safety standards manifold, one may have to pay a much higher premium if one chooses to drive cars on their own rather than let the computers take over. Another question is how much should be left to the commuter's will? Manual drivers may genuinely be unable to conform to required standards temporarily, but as long as they're on the road in such a state of nonconformity, they would be considered a threat to everyone else.

“ We think this is a really critical step towards imposing and working towards the level of safety needed in this arena ”

*Anthony Foxx  
U.S. Secretary of Transportation  
After issuing guidelines for self-driving cars*

In order to reduce legislative complexity and to ensure commuter safety, it is expected that there would also be a base standard and standardisation body/process for systems performance and care that all vehicles should conform to. It would presumably be managed by a government regulatory body, although it is possible that self regulating bodies may arise as in the case of the Central Board of Film Certification in India.

Sadly, such a discussion is more likely than not futile in India, where politics controls all. The total number of bills pending in the parliament is around 28 and 354 have lapsed because they hadn't been passed by the previous governments. Some of the Bills include the ones like The National Road Safety and Traffic Management Board Bill, 2010 and The Consumer Protection Bill, 2018. So if such important bills like the one mentioned above have lapsed then it is very possible that India has a long way to go before a legislation is even voted on in the Parliament regarding the deployment of autonomous vehicles on Indian roads. The situation in Courts of Law isn't much better. The top five tribunals in the nation have a combined backlog of over 3.5 lakh cases.

### The Outfall - Social:

A major hindrance to introducing autonomous vehicles anywhere at all is social response. The introduction of such autonomous might not be well accepted by the multitude of the Indian population, for instance. Firstly we have commercial vehicle drivers and owners losing their jobs. And here we are talking about numbers not in hundreds or thousands but millions which is about the population of a small European nation. Disgruntled masses may take to the streets and the legislation is

bound to be powerless against such a humongous force. Even if these people are provided with alternate jobs, there will be the problem of 'job skill mismatch' which we have already discussed above. Will these people be happy with their new jobs? For a country whose unofficial motto has been, 'chalta hai, chalne do' (if it works, let it work), it may be hard to adapt to such a tremendous change. The natural disbelief in new and forward technology is bound to make a lot of people uncomfortable with the idea of subscription.

Leave alone subscriptions, people simply do not trust machines as much as they do humans, even if the machines are known and shown to be the safer option, and this is not just restricted to India. This effect is particularly prevalent at the onset of any new technological breakthrough that requires extensive testing to better itself, which is the stage autonomous cars are at. The issue faced by these in particular is that any mistake could be fatal, which strengthens people's mistrust of self driving cars - thus reducing the scope for free testing of the cars, hence limiting the path to improvement. It's a vicious cycle that either requires the cars to be near-perfect from the get-go, or for people to abandon their apprehensions. This behaviour to autonomous vehicles isn't just a response to their performance, but also in the decision making process involved. Given a societal problem with a widely accepted solution, society has greater tolerance for human failures. Wade into genuine ethical problems, and the water around computerized decision processes get murkier.



*“Does your car have any idea why my car pulled it over?”*

The Trolley Problem (and its variants) is a common ethical dilemma often brought up in such discussions. For those unfamiliar, it (the specific problem here) goes such: an autonomous vehicle is headed for an unavoidable collision, and there are two ways to deal with it - either kill the other party involved in the collision, or kill the car occupants. It must choose one of the two, there is no way out.

We leave the actual ethics of either action up to the reader (there are many considerations one can make, and a Facebook meme page dedicated to this), and ask them to consider the possible consequence in implementation. The government may incline towards regulations in favour of making the decision that would “cost the least lives”. However, they may choose to leave it up to the manufacturer whether or not a vehicle should try to protect its own occupants or minimize fatalities (should the two goals be at conflict), with incentives to those corporations that prioritize minimizing the damage. Which means manufacturers could sell specific vehicles, or dedicate their entire fleet to vehicles that prioritize their occupants’ lives over the “greater (heuristic) good” - for a premium paid by the consumer to account for the excess charged by the government. Consider the effect this has on society - one would essentially be able to explicitly buy themselves their lives at the potential cost of others’.

There are other social and cultural issues if we look beyond the ethics of automation. If autonomous vehicles become the norm, leading to the decline of manually driven cars, it would also affect our psyche and culture. For example, how can we compensate for the denial of joy of driving to a life-long car enthusiast? So bid your goodbyes to the American quarter mile drag or the Tokyo drift because now your car is built neither to let you drive nor to drift, unless you are at a commercial “car stable”, driving cars like they are horses.

Given the direction the vehicular industry seems to be heading regarding autonomous vehicles and personal vehicular ownership, it’s possible that auto manufacturers and other companies like Uber would follow a subscription based model much akin to Netflix or Spotify today, where the vehicles would be rented. From a legislative point of view, this simplifies matters by a lot - since the brunt of vehicular upkeep is on the managing company, all but a few cases could be attributed to them. Despite the simplification of legal liabilities because of decline in individual ownership, it would come however, at a cost of individual identity and liberty - a topic that might be a touchy subject to some, for reasons ideological and otherwise. For instance, vintage car communities might flounder, as they wouldn’t be able to buy and drive their vehicles on roads and convene for events, which many would consider a huge cultural loss.

## The Road Ahead

Given the current status on autonomous vehicles with respect to their technological development, it’s highly unlikely that they shall be street legal within the next five, or even ten years anywhere in the world - and when considering India, twenty seems to be a safer bet. But while the technology may or may not progress, the question remains as to whether the world will be able to adapt quickly enough to accommodate for the inevitable changes. □

## Levels of Automation:

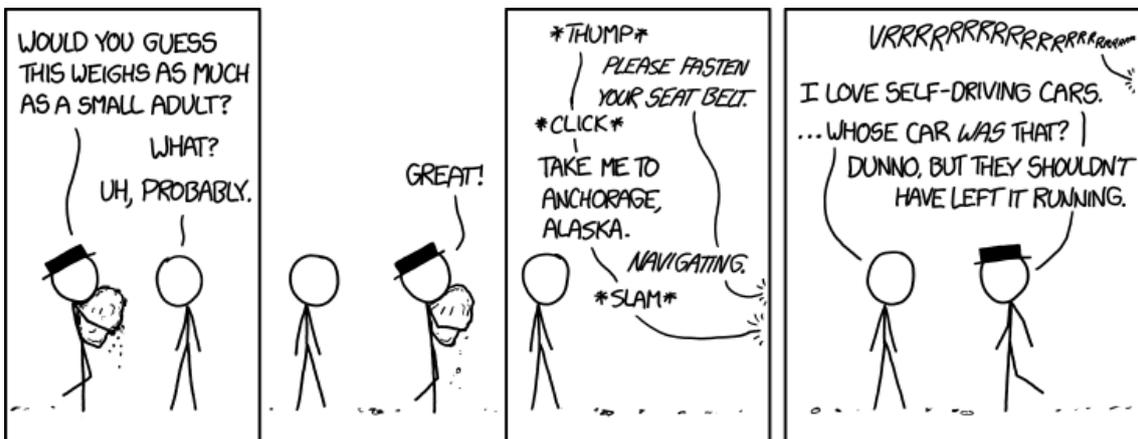
There are in fact six levels (scale of 0 to 5) of car autonomy from “no automation” to “full automation” as defined by the SAE International (Society of Automotive Engineers). The ones mentioned in this article are:

**Level 1 (Driver Assistance):** Vehicles with this level of autonomy, in some driving modes, can handle steering or throttle and braking – but never both. However, the driver must be ready to take over those functions if called upon by the vehicle. Level 1 cars also have some systems that use Information about the driving environment, but the human driver monitors the driving environment. Level 1 autonomous systems have been available on production cars for several years, and features such as self parking and lane assistance fall into this bracket.

**Level 5 (Fully Autonomous):** At this level, the vehicle needs no human control at all. It doesn’t need to have pedals, or a steering wheel, or even a human onboard. The car is fully automated and can do all driving tasks on any road, under any conditions, whether there’s a human on board or not.

*This article is part of the column ‘Eye to the Future’ that is dedicated to long form articles based on contemporary and future impact of technology and scientific progress on society.*

**Call for pitches:** Interested in contributing to this column? Shoot an email to ping@students.iiit.ac.in with your pitch for the column.



Credits: XKCD Comics

Credits: Neil Trivedi



# Wise Wendy

## Academics

***I feel that I am extremely slow in my PhD research. I moved to system building and it was a bold decision. How do I pace up now?***

Forget building systems, build relationships. Good, meaningful, ecstasy-inducing relationships. With your PhD advisor. The thesis will come before you (know it).

***What are the questions that are going to come for my BEC Mid-Semester examination?***

The big question that will come to you - "Why didn't I study before?". "Is it too late to drop out of college now?", "Could I get away with murder?", "How easy is it to fake mental illness?" are also possibilities.

## Love

***I have fallen head over heels for somebody one year junior to me. Should I make a move or wait?***

You're a senior for God's sake. Go ahead, make the healthy interactions less healthy, I'm sure no one minds. Breaking the ice with a junior is a piece of cake, anyway.

***Will I get a boyfriend?***

Unlikely. Extremely unlikely. Given the scanty number of boys in college and their absolute unwillingness to be in relationships, this not only seems hard, it seems downright impossible. You can always explore the other side of the spectrum though. ;)

***How do I decide if I need my boyfriend? Help me decide his utility.***

I'm surprised you haven't learnt this yet. Here's a simple function to help you with this:

$$U(\text{BF}) = D/S + U(C)/100 + \ln(\text{PBF})/\text{avlen}(P)$$

Desirability, D=number of girls hitting on him;  
Insecurity, S=number of girls he's hitting on,  
Utility of Commitment,  $U(C)=A+F$ ; A= % of courses he can help with, F=% of your expenses he handles.  
From the latest studies,  $\text{avlen}(P)=13.12\text{cm}$ . The rest you can figure.

Ideally, I prefer  $U(\text{BF}) > 3$ , but you can pick your own standards. ;)

## College

***Why are the BSD and EHD branches not there anymore?***

Building sciences and humanities have no place in our institute. Neither do the natural sciences, for that matter. Thumb rule: If you can't code it, it does not belong.

***Where in IIIT is the best place to hide a dead body?***

In the IHS classes. They're practically graveyards, with the many dead bodies you can find there. KCIS is another decent option. What with the roof already fallen, we don't know how long the rest of the building will last anyway.

## General

***Is communism better than capitalism?***

Think about it this way, do you prefer knowledge being shared or being possessed by a privileged few? In other words, is having written assignments better than OJ?

***How do I get these Art of Living cultists to stop spreading propaganda?***

Sit back, be calm, take a few deep breaths, meditate. And then drug yourself into doing fucking nothing because that is the solution to all life problems - this included.

***Are all guys straight?***

They curl in front with pain when they are kicked in certain places, but yeah, mostly all straight.

***Why is 42 the answer?***

Because the question is "How old is the oldest (known) dual degree undergrad still on campus?"

## Rest

***Ping should not advertise this. This is just wrong.***

I agree, and I agree. I have absolutely no problem living with a guilty conscience though. So, what is your question?

***Why are the editors of Ping such assholes?***

The Ping editors have a long history, almost a legacy of being assholes. It comes from the shit that they have to deal with. Oh, and sometimes they also get fucked badly. Even if they didn't start off as an asshole, they have to adapt.

***Would you like to grab some dinner with me?***

Sure, as long as I get different plates for my veggies and meat. ;)

***Do you want to hook up?***

If your utility is greater than 3 based on the aforementioned utility function. Don't lie about the  $\ln(\text{PBF})$ . I can almost always tell. Oh, and if you're not a guy, just your bank credentials will do.



Wendy's wisdom has pushed my cynicism off this issue.

Find me online here:

<http://ping.iiit.ac.in/?s=cynical+cindy>

# The Club Renaissance at IIIT

Last year saw the beginning of the Art Society at college, and the Debate Club took on a completely new life. Both clubs were at their peak during Felicity this year, with the Debate Club conducting the IIITH Parliamentary Debate which had a nationwide participation of more than twenty colleges, and the Art Society, among other things, collaborating to paint the beautiful mural of the lady with the flying hair, that now adorns several social media profiles.

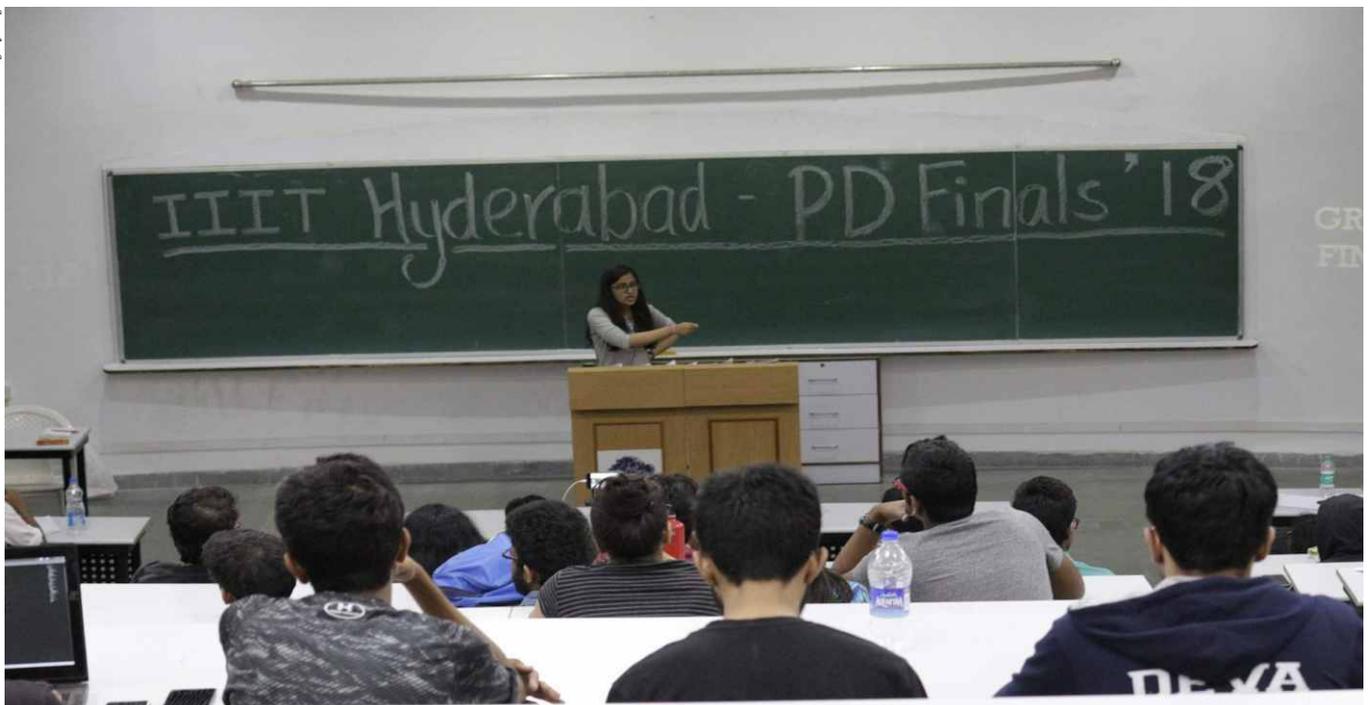
Tanmai Khanna talks about his experience with debate, and helping revive a club at college, and Mayank Modi talks about art, and what it takes to start a new club on campus.

**Note:** These pieces were edited into articles based on some questions posed to the authors by the editors.

## 'Never Debate, Always Discuss'

Tanmai Khanna

Credits: Vijayraj



A speaker from NLS Bangalore makes a point.

### On the debate scene in college two years ago

When I entered IIIT Hyderabad, I noticed that there was a debating club but it was very different from the sort of societies I saw back in DU, where I had studied for a year. Unlike what I had seen, the club did not have a group of constant members, but the sessions were open. I soon realised that this was because of the crazy academic schedules. While I do not claim that I have revolutionised the club in any way or brought any significant change, I thought that at the time, I didn't really see a love for debating in existing members.

### On prior experience with debate

I used to debate a little bit in school but I started properly in 2015 when I joined the Hansraj Debating Society. We had debating tournaments almost every weekend and even in college we had a lot of time for extracurricular activities and hence I started debating and taking part virtually everywhere. I lost in tournaments miserably at the start, but much like any activity, it started getting better with practice.

I was fascinated by the way the people at the society fought with words and the amount of knowledge they had. Interestingly, what appealed to me more was how much fun the society was having.

They used to hang out together all the time and were a very tightly knit group. For the year that I was a part of it, we were the best of friends and almost a family. I made lifelong friends with these people and what really attracted me to them was that they weren't pretentious at all. **They weren't the cliched elitist debaters that everyone thought them to be, but just crazy people like everyone else who enjoyed constantly putting themselves and their capabilities of argumentation to test.** These qualities are what compliment debating and make it a lot more fun and that's what I envision for the debating club in IIIT.

### On revamping debate at college



One of the club sessions

When I came to IIIT, I wanted to spread the kind of debating that I had learnt and through that, debating in general. My aim for when I became the coordinator was to try and instil a sense of belongingness in the students who were members and using the love of debating as a common trait, try to make this club as active as it could be.

Even when I was in my first year, I started conducting sessions and mock debates whenever it was possible (keeping everyone's schedules in mind). I wanted these students to take this activity seriously and to make that possible we tried to get some interested members to come again and again to form a sense of familiarity to the club and debating.

We conducted a national level debate tournament this year, which I think really helped in making club members realise that they are part of something important, and capable of much more than they believe. It would have been almost impossible for us to conduct the tournament, that too on working days, but the Organising Committee worked very hard and I think they themselves feel happy to see the fruit of their labour, thereby instilling a sense of "patriotism" to the club. This, I feel, is very important in the first year students as they will be the future leaders of this club.

The IIITH Parliamentary Debate is according to me an important milestone for our club as it gave our students a unique insight into the Parliamentary Debating world as they witnessed nationally recognised debaters participate and fight to win the tournament over a course of three days. I was awestruck the first time I saw my seniors in DU debate. I hope that the members

of the club saw these debaters and were inspired, just like I was, to one day be able to speak with such skill and impact.

### On debating and me

Debating and my experience in DU has pretty much shaped who I am today. I have become more confident and open minded. Before debating, I didn't care much about gender issues, thought "feminazi" was a thing, and thought that animals were made to be our food. **All this changed when I was forced to, by this activity, defend different sides of issues in society and once I realised that I was conveniently ignoring a lot of information, it also forced me to learn about all sides and their justifications.** Then it was only natural that I weighed these justifications and started forming my own opinions, soon aligning my actions to satisfy my conscience.

### On understanding issues better

I find it appalling that a lot of people these days think debating is just about one side winning and not constructive discussion. The reason we allot sides in debates is only so that each side can critically focus on their side. What comes out of a debate is not a winner, but a more nuanced and evolved understanding of people and the social structures of the world we exist in. In a society where different societies are happy in their own echo chambers, I think it is absolutely imperative for people to debate and discuss issues for societies to evolve. This is true for conservatives, liberals and pretty much everyone along the political spectrum.

An interesting example of this is an experience from a debate tournament which I took part in very recently at Christ University (Deemed to be), Bangalore. The motion/topic was "This house supports feminist campaigns which glorify housewives" and we were the proposition which basically meant that I had to defend the glorification of housewives by feminists. Now, my general views on the issue were along the lines of how a lot of women are coerced or conditioned into becoming housewives and that it is inherently patriarchal and sexist and hence feminist campaigns should decry it.

However, in the twenty minutes given to us to make a case, we started thinking about it and realised that while all of that might be true, there are a lot of women, and there will be a lot of women who will continue to be housewives, perhaps because of their religion, tradition or even coercion. Since the feminist movement constantly says that a more feminist choice would be to leave the households, and in many liberal circles, being a housewife is often seen as being a sell out to patriarchy or as a lack of aspirations, these women and even conservative families often get severely antagonised and refuse to be a part of the movement. Because of this, a lot of the issues that these women face, like domestic violence and unequal treatment in the house cannot be dealt with because their views aren't a part of feminist discourse and any effort made to help them will be seen as patronising. Hence, by glorifying housewives (not the fact that

women should be housewives), we can make society recognise their work which largely goes unnoticed and uncredited, and once we have their support, we can go forward in our endeavours to make these households more feminist, instead of offering leaving the household as the only option, which may not be accessible to a lot of women by choice or consequence.

This of course, was only one of the arguments and may even be incorrect, but the point is that it forced me to think against what I know and what came out of it was a more nuanced understanding of feminist issues where now the reception of a message becomes an

important consideration and not just the principles of the message.

I think if you try very hard, you can live an entire life without ever giving a fuck about these issues or about society, but in a democracy, everyone is given a say in how the future of our country will look like. It is important then that people think critically and to the best of their capabilities, try to be fair to opinions from all sides and constantly debate with others and themselves to evolve and try to become better and more responsible citizens. □

## Drawing Alone, Drawing Together, And Everything In Between

Mayank Modi



Along with the result of a collaborative art activity. Credits: Mayank Modi.

### The Art Scene At IIIT Before The Society

We are definitely not the the first generation of artists at IIIT. There have been many artists before us and there have been art events where people have

collaborated in bigger numbers than us.

Prateek Pandey painted the whole wall leading from NBH to Vindhya canteen on his own. Faculty organised events have seen Himalaya being painted with abstract art. An attempt at 3D painting was also made - the now worn out painting on the road between Vindhya and Himalaya was meant to be a hole in the ground with lava spewing out. People have always made attempts to draw and paint on the walls of their rooms - some creating masterpieces - but these eventually get painted over because of hostel rules. And of course, HSS classes existed as a platform for expressing art skills.

However, as a resident of the campus, I felt that the art that was created never made an attempt to ask for the respect it deserved. Artifacts created during Felicity may just end up as room decor in GH, the only salvation for paintings made during HSS was the possibility of being hung in rooms. The wall murals of OBH face oblivion under layers of whitewash and any art created by an individual would be confined to a probable social media post.

Before the society, it seemed like art in campus was mostly the means to do something, never the goal itself. During Kalakshetra, we wanted the campus decorated, and art was a way to do it. The art created during HSS was just to pass the course. After the goal was accomplished, the art was forgotten. Only the wall murals seem to have seen justice in this regard.

### Art And Me

A nice art teacher in school helped me explore the field a little, but apart from a few competitions I didn't do anything serious. My art skills were confined to decorating assignments for extra marks and diagrams in lab records.

Interestingly, where I actually discovered myself was in HSS classes. Shajil sir was lenient and encouraging and I was motivated to put a lot of effort into sketching and making sculptures. The TA at that time, Amitha was also appreciative and she roped me into helping

with one of the wall paintings - the one with the dragon and dancing ladies. In time, I began exploring my shortcomings and was soon improving with every brush stroke. I helped make the not so great upside down painting of the girl in the city, and the next year a much better spray painting of the Kurt Cobain, Daft Punk, Tyler trio.

Meanwhile I kept stretching my own limits. Art boosted my self confidence and I marvel at how I can find solace in just spreading paint around.

## The Conception Of The Society

In my second year, I ended up coordinating the wall painting for Felicity when two MTech students approached me regarding making a community where we can paint together and share what we know and our work. I liked the idea and one of the things that motivated me was my love for stationary and knowing that if we could have a club which college provided for, this would help me explore all sorts of different mediums.

The MTech students later backed out, but by then I had gotten things moving.

## Making Art Society Legit

The first step was for us to find out what it takes to form a club. We headed to cult council and SURPRISE - all you need is 15 interested people and upto 3 motivated participants (the coordinators) who would be ready to deal with finances and organisation.



Absorbed. Credits: Mayank Modi

Then I started personally talking to the people who I knew were into art. Trying to see what the reaction would be to such a thing. Gauging their expectations from the club and meanwhile motivating them with the activities we could have. We made an inventory of things we would need and found their prices to form a tentative budget.

Next we had a few initial activities to help people feel attached to the group. The first one we did was to recreate the sceneries we drew as kids. All the time, we had to keep talking to the SLC chair, Radhika ma'am to show her we were actually serious about the thing. Her understanding nature and support were instrumental in making the society happen.

## The Real World Issues Of A Club

The first issue was the lack of knowledge on how to start a club at college. The information is not documented anywhere at all. You have to talk to several people to hear their part and finally understand the dynamics.

We had delays in implementation - we had one activity planned for Spring '17 but the delay in a meeting for the budget allocation for the academic year 2017-2018 (which ended up happening in January 2018) meant that we would not know if the college had enough money to spare for a new club. The delays were due to unavailability of all the involved staff on the same date and some other reasons I am unaware of.

Coordinators without enough motivation was a huge setback. Some coordinators left in the very beginning. Thankfully, others came to help out when needed.

Inviting, motivating, sometimes almost forcing seniors to come to meets was one difficulty we faced as we knew that there were some good artists who we wanted to be part of bigger things, but academic schedules are cruel and there was always a lower than expected turnout from the seniors initially. There was also very little participation from the second year students which meant I had to be there all the time with the first year students. My personal schedule was also a hurdle. But now I'm really happy that the first year students are slowly taking the onus.

Conducting regular events involves - getting finances approved which takes time (I would love some changes in this process). Getting materials. And then striking a suitable date with all the interested people. And then praying that OJ is not hosted at the same time.

## Why I Feel Art Is Important

When language was made we tried to put everything we had to tell the other person into words. There still isn't enough language to express your deepest feelings. You can't describe the cringe when someone scratches a blackboard, or the happiness of returning home. In my opinion, it may be enough to explain to the other person that you are happy or sad and sometimes the reason, but you want to tell yourself more. Till date, I have not found a better medium than art. People might not always understand what you draw or create, but

There is a different satisfaction in giving form to those impulses in your neurons.

## Ah, Art!

It really mostly starts as some sort of satisfaction, there has to be a reason why people doodle their heart out in boring classes. But when you get good at it, when people start getting it, art becomes exciting. While you would love to keep looking at your work and feel good, what makes it real is appreciation. To be honest, seeing my picture as part of people's DP's, cover

Pictures, and stories-whether credits are given or not-just the fact that they liked it is heart-warming. It is exciting to think that one day I will pass out of college, and the mural will stay on as my mark in college and possibly a benchmark of creativity and effort (Although I feel like a proud asshole gloating - everytime I pass by it, I stand for a moment and just stare at it). Making the Art society has been fulfilling when I see that despite the various ways in which people can succumb to pressure in our institute - with PT, heavy coursework, research and so on - people are still able to see the beauty there is in art, and life. ◻



Art by Gowri Lekshmy



Credits: Art Society

# I Dreamt I Was A Butterfly...

Neelesh Agrawal

The informal genre of ‘mind-fuck’ movies is very popular in IIT. The craving for a movie that will blow your mind, and leave you thinking for days, delivering a suspense that was otherwise right in front of your nose, and leaves you in awe, is powerful. Imagine having all that... in an Indian movie.

When *Lucia* was recommended to me, I started off with a usual cynicism that comes with watching Indian movies. “Sure, it might be really good, but only for an Indian movie. That doesn’t make it brilliant on the whole.” I was about to be proven very wrong indeed.

*Lucia* opens with our protagonist in a critical medical condition, and a special detective investigating the events leading up to his predicament. Our protagonist is a “torch-shiner at the talkies”, who suffers from insomnia, but is soon introduced to a special dream pill “Lucia”, that make his dreams vivid. What follows is a suspenseful and mysterious ride of separating dream and reality, as our protagonist discovers love and meaning in life, while diving deeper into the world of his dreams.

*Lucia* is clearly influenced by other popular Hollywood ‘mind-fuck’ movies. Pawan Kumar, the writer-director, often seems to channel David Lynch (director of *Mulholland Drive*, *Blue Velvet*) in his manipulative technique. What is also at his disposal, however, are the masala elements of Indian cinema. Part of the beauty of *Lucia* is that it blends intellectual

storytelling with the typical Indian cinema tropes. There are item songs, comedy, romantic banter, and the like, which are of course, entertaining, but they also leave you unhinged once the suspenseful elements hit. And boy, do they hit hard.

*Lucia* is also heavily influenced by Christopher Nolan in its visual and narrative style. The elements of suspense are scattered along the narrative well before the suspense is actually revealed, much like *The Prestige*. The visual style of *Memento* is directly employed, using monochrome and colour to differentiate between the two timelines (or rather, realities). And of course, when the story itself is about dreams, one can’t help but draw comparisons with the classic, *Inception*.

Beside Nolan and Lynch, who Pawan Kumar himself admitted to have been influences, there’s a small throwback to David Fincher’s *Fight Club*, in a scene from the last sequence.

Having pointed out all these heavy influences from popular Hollywood, I must also admit that at no point does *Lucia* feel derivative, delivering a suspenseful and original story. Somewhere between Indian movie masala and Hollywood-grade intellectual storytelling, *Lucia* takes on a life of its own, making it a movie for all to watch. And this is why I recommend watching it; have all your expectations shattered, and truly be “mind-fucked”. □

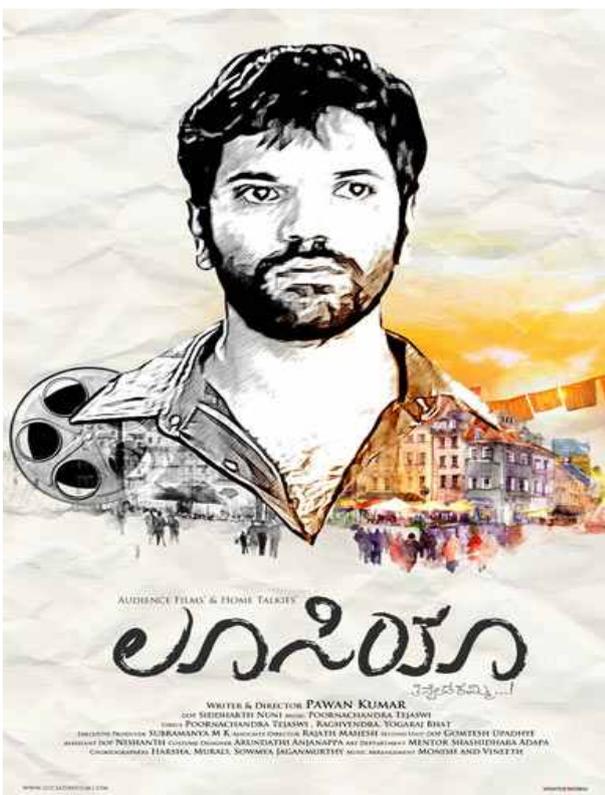
**PS:** The title of my review is a reference to the famous paradox, *Zhuangzi* and *the butterfly*, which plays out in the movie. The movie itself opens with a Kannada poem by Kanaka Das, *Ne Mayeyolago*, which also deals with the concepts of illusion and dream. This encapsulation of fascinating philosophical ideas in *Lucia* makes it all the more beautiful.

**Suggested Viewing from Nerdwriter:**

- 1) How Lynch Manipulates You  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXZK0Binfk4>
- 2) The Prestige: Hiding in Plain Sight  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d46Azg3Pm4c>

**Favourite Movies from 2017:**

Call Me By Your Name, Blade Runner 2049



**Lucia (2013)**

Written And Directed By: **Pawan Kumar**  
Run Time: **135 minutes**

# You Are What You Eat?

Trupthi Ann John

Geo is new to the extraterrestrial world. He has never been outside earth before. He is in the mess hall with Kyro, an extraterrestrial human being.



**Geo:** What's that you are eating, Kyro?

**Kyro:** It's Bekolli Souffle. Very tasty and nutritious. Want some?

**Geo:** Bekolli.. BEKOLLI! You mean one of those creatures we met yesterday?

**Kyro:** Yes, why? What's wrong?

**Geo:** But he was alive! I mean, he talked! I mean, we talked to him! Er, he was sentient!

**Kyro:** (mouth full): mm, oh yeah. They are one of the more intelligent species out here.

**Geo:** That's cannibalism! I didn't know space humans have degraded so much! ... (Starts to freak out)

**Kyro:** Calm down, it's not cannibalism. Now if I were to eat you, well...

**Geo:** Gah! You can't just talk to someone one day and eat him the next day!

**Kyro:** I'm pretty sure this bekolli is not Kthlgura. I talked to him today about the sketch for Section 14A. He's fine.

**Geo:** What, he had no problem that you are eating a member of his species?

**Kyro:** That's the circle of life. Dogs eat cats, cats eat

mice, mice eat.. Cheese? Are mice herbivores, Geo?

**Geo:** (Still freaking out) That is entirely not the point. Would you be ok if there were creatures that eat humans?

**Kyro:** Of course, there are creatures that eat humans. Blaf-hahah eat humans. So do Rogenslros.

**Geo:** Blafaha-what now?

**Kyro:** Oh Blaf-hahah. Their name is unpronounceable. The Diplos came up with that name after sitting for 8 hours with the Blaf-hahaha diplomatic team. We needed something that sounded close to their name and was not offensive in either language. The Diplos didn't tell them that hahaha means something else to humans.

**Geo:** We have diplomatic relations with a species that eats humans?

**Kyro:** Yup. They have power over the entire Belar sector. Plus they have monopoly over trytonium trade. We needed to give several trade concessions before they agreed to favour us over the Cremolians. What's the big deal? Even on earth, there were creatures that ate humans, right? Er, lions and tiggers?

**Geo:** Tigers, you mean? They died out long ago. \*sigh\*. Anyway, we don't have diplomatic relations with them! How is it even possible to make deals with someone who might eat you at any moment?

**Kyro:** Oh, they won't eat diplomats in safe zones. It's only in the wild that they eat humans. If you are out in the wild with inferior weapons and you met a Blaf-hahah with superior weapons and speed, and who was hungry enough, be prepared to be Blaf-hahaha lunch. On the other hand, if you had superior weapons, you might kill the Blaf-hahah.

**Geo:** Do humans eat the Blafalas too?

**Kyro:** No no, doesn't agree with our stomach. They are Oblates. Only oblivore creatures can eat them, like Gramuba worms. Incidentally, Gramuba worms are a delicacy of Bekollis. See? Circle of life.

**Geo:** (To himself) This is not ok, this is not ok, this is not ok..

**Kyro:** Ah, you'll get used to it. □

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