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WATCH OUT

Student's News Magazine



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OUR
TEAM

To New Beginnings

As human beings, we often assess our lives on the basis of the lives of people around us. We evaluate our work depending on how well people before us have fared at it, and derive a sense of achievement by comparing our accomplishments with theirs'. A dangerous proposition indeed, if I may be honest enough to admit. Subsequently, this immediately eliminates the existence of any absolute standard of self-assessment. In the absence of an individual metric, don't we all tumble down to the same level, whereupon subjectivity in opinion sets up apart? And if what we feel about ourselves depends on how good other people in the room are, and irrespective of where we stand there almost always has to be a room with people who are just 'naturally better' than we are, what is the point of even trying?

There are two major flaws in this argument, I believe. One, is that evolution has wired us humans in a manner that we always strive to be the best in our immediate vicinity. Seven billion people on the planet, but our efforts are always aimed at becoming better than people we see or meet daily or compare ourselves against. Secondly, this argument fails to realize how growth itself can be a powerful motivator for humans to grow further. Learning and excelling in our endeavors becomes a sound motive for most of our undertakings.

We raise a similar point in this issue's cover story. Talking about the existing divide between students and professors, we ponder upon the several reasons for loss of academic interest in students. We have tried to present both sides of this debate - the professors' and the students'; and the controversial 75 percent attendance rule also finds its due mention. In addition, we talk about the state of undergraduate research in our institute, and how its output can be improved by designing a comprehensive academic plan that rewards students who perform well in research projects, much like our sister IITs.

In the big story we present (hopefully delightful) details behind several sites and occurrences here in IIT Roorkee that are peculiar enough for the subtle taste of a news agency. Two of the places that find mention are the EC tower and the (ever?)under construction buildings behind Cautley Bhawan. The presence of an uncannily high number of trees, gates and guards also begs coverage. Speaking of coverage, we are proud to present in this issue, an interview of Mr. Amit Singhal, Senior VP at Google and a UoR alumnus. The scale and importance of his work at Google is incredible and we are immensely grateful to him for having taken out time to talk to us.

As I start running out of space and words dear reader, I'd like to end on the same note on which I began this column. Nothing is perfect and those who claim to be flawless require serious introspection. From a wall poster to a semesterly magazine, in the 21 years of its run, Watch Out! has always tried to evolve; changing its functioning to keep in pace with a dynamic campus. Of course, there are several areas where we can still improve in. As a fresh batch of Watch Out! takes over the reins from the previous one, we promise our readers- both old and new-growth shall remain an important aspect of the work we do. While the world is busy dealing with Ebola and avoiding Interstellar spoilers, you can rest assured- whenever there is any event that makes waves in IIT Roorkee, you will find a Watch Out correspondent there. Sometimes with complex journalism tools that even very few of us actually understand; at other times standing awkwardly in one corner, waiting for someone to come and tell him what happened.

Anubhav Bindlish

The Google Guy

Amitabh Kumar "Amit" Singhal is senior vice president and software engineer at Google Inc., a Google Fellow, and the head of Google's core ranking team. Born in Jhansi, a city in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India, Amit received a Bachelor of Engineering degree in computer science from IIT Roorkee in 1989. He continued his computer science education in the United States, and received an M.S. degree from University of Minnesota Duluth in 1991. In 2000, he joined Google. He now runs Google's core search quality department. He and his team are responsible for the Google search algorithms. According to New York Times, Mr. Singhal is the master of what Google calls its ranking algorithm.



Amit Singhal is senior vice president and head of Google's core search team

The fact that we have copied the aforementioned information from wikipedia would explain the gargantuan nature of the role played by this man. Google has redefined the reach of humans. It is not just a company. It is an extremely critical invention by some of the smartest people on earth for the greater good of humans. Mr. Singhal is one of the people who have made it possible. It is an honor for Watch Out! News Agency, to present to you the the words of one of the greatest IITR alumni of all time; one of the guys who made Google a verb. In conversation with Mr. Amit Singhal:

WONA: Sir, first of all it's truly an honor for all of us to have you back here. How does it feel to be back in Roorkee?

It feels really good. It's been a really long time. I haven't been back in pretty much, the entire 25 years. The campus has changed quite a bit. It's a pleasure.

WONA: 25 years! What all changes do you observe in the campus from then and now?

Well, there are a lot more buildings that I don't recognize. It's kinda hard to walk because there's a new building cropping up somewhere. It's not the campus I remembered. The other key change I am noticing is that there's far too much security and gates. Trust me, we didn't have any of that.

WONA: You must have had a lot of memories of this place. Can you mention one that stands out?

Oh, one time I got busted ragging some of the freshmen. That was a bad idea, by the way. (Laughs) My humble message to the students of IIT Roorkee: No one should do anything unfair to the freshmen.

I got busted and seriously it wasn't a very happy experience.

WONA: From UoR to Minnesota to Cornell and finally Google. What changes have you observed in yourself? Is there something that has remained constant?

Clearly, one thing that comes with time is experience. You learn a lot. But the key to that is you should be open to learn. So to grow, and I feel that I have grown tremendously, as a professional and as a human being, you have to be open to new ideas. Keep your mind open and learn all the time no matter how old you are, is pretty much what I have done my entire life. It gives a valuable insight into how people perceive things and how people behave. To sum up, I would just say that I want to learn all the time. In some sense, learning has been constant for me.

WONA: How did you spend your free-time here in Roorkee?

I was noticing this last evening. In my time, at 11pm,



the campus would be buzzing with people. The Chai shop would be open and me along with my friends, would all have been sitting out there. It was a surprise for me to see that the whole place was dead last night at 11. We used to hang out. I used to play a lot of billiards in the students club. And I also did a lot of things that I won't say on record (laughs). We were out continuously.

WONA: Did you date anyone here on Campus?

No. I did not.

The interviewers at this point feel proud that they are on the same page with Mr. Singhal on this particular issue.

WONA: After 25 glorious years, which includes rewriting the algorithm that has now redefined lives of billions of people and becoming one of the smartest people in tech on this planet, what keeps you moving?

Look, you have to realize that we are here on earth for a limited period of time. And sooner or later, we all have to leave this inherited place for the better. All of us have an important purpose in life. You have got to really love what you do. And honestly, I tremendously love what I do. This just keeps me moving. I work with an exceptional team for a company that really has had a huge positive impact on earth. It's a dream job. And I have a beautiful family.

A beautiful family combined with my dream job gives me a beautiful journey, which is on going.

WONA: Sir, you are an inspiration for all of us here in IIT R. We were curious to know: From where do you draw your inspiration?

My inspirations change over time as I have gotten older. Earlier on and even now, I draw inspiration from

scientists who had played great roles in solving the problems of the world. I wanted to be like one of them. It was my dream. Albert Einstein and my advisor at Cornell, Gerard Salton, who pretty much invented the field of 'search' were my inspiration. At the same time, now I am hugely inspired by people who do something for the world who are completely selfless and make this world a better place to live, like Mother Teresa and Malala Yousafzai.

WONA: One lesson in life that you'd like to share with the students of IITR?

Of course. There are so many lessons I have learnt over the course of time! I don't even know where to start. Maybe if you can get me to talk for an hour or so, all of them would eventually come out. However, there's one of the simple things that I have learnt: Whenever you stand on a fork, make a decision and never look back. And I can give a hundred anecdotes from my life when I have done that. Make a decision and never look back because a wise man once said, there are no right decisions; you make the decisions right.

WONA: What is the one thing you still miss about Roorkee?

The carefree time I spent here with friends who only had friendship to offer each other. Nothing more and nothing less. It's been a long time. You see, at that time here, there was nothing anyone could take from someone else and nothing someone could give back. It was just pure joy, love, bliss: it was just friendship. Even after 25 years I am extremely happy to come back and see all these people. With some of them I have spent endless hours doing nothing and those were joyous moments that I cherish.

Cloak of Anonymity

"Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth."

- Oscar Wilde

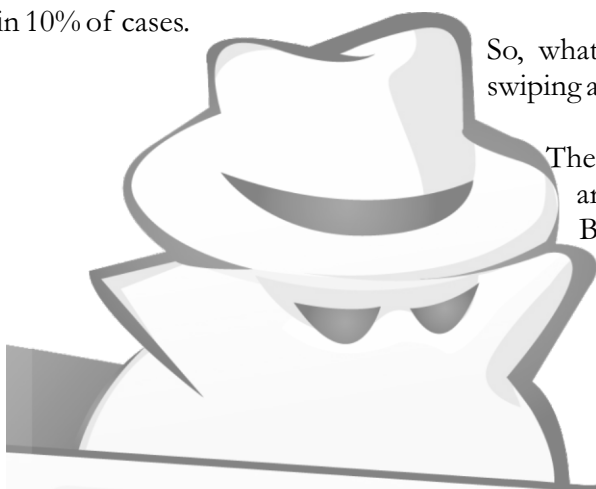
Anonymity over the internet and the effect it has on people raises several interesting questions about human nature, especially in the aftermath of Wikileaks and The Fappening. While the first utilized this anonymity to raise a voice against world governments, the other used the same for depraved motives. What remains beyond question is that humans behave differently when under the shroud of anonymity. But do people behave irrationally due to this newfound freedom or does anonymity just bring out the real person we hide behind self we pretend to be in order to gain social acceptance? And if the second case is true, are websites that allow user anonymously to blame to any extent, considering they only bring out the truth?

It is usually accepted that the internet is a means to escape from the heartless mistress that reality is, a place where we can pretend to be whoever we want to be. Once a person has an entity or more precisely, a representation of himself on this network in the form of a profile or an avatar, he is still held responsible for his activities. However, there are a number of popular internet sites that don't require the user to submit any kind of identification information. It is not very surprising then, when a 4chan user hacks into celebrities' clouds and leaks their private photographs. Never before has mankind been exposed to such freedom from social responsibility, something which not everyone can handle.

Deindividuation, which in many cases is a direct result of anonymity, bears explanation to a lot of situations we encounter in everyday life. It's what happens when the notion of social norms is withdrawn due to concealed identities. A classic example of de-individuation is the Halloween Study conducted by Ed Diener in 1976. Diener and colleagues had a woman place a bowl of candy in her living room for trick-or-treaters. An observer was placed out of sight from the children in order to record their behavior. In one condition, the woman asked the children identification questions such as where they lived, who their parents were, what their name was, etc. In the other condition, children were completely anonymous. The children were then left alone with a bowl of candy with instruction to take only one piece of candy. Being part of an anonymous group far outnumbered other conditions in terms of how many times they took more than one piece of candy. In 60% of cases, the anonymous group of children took more than one piece, sometimes even the entire bowl of candy. Anonymous individuals and children who were identified but part of a group tied for second, taking more than one piece of candy 20% of the time. Children who were both identified and alone were the most law-abiding, taking more than one piece of candy only in 10% of cases.

So, what exactly causes the un-masked trick and treaters to refrain swiping a few extra candies?

The most obvious answer would be accountability. In a society, we are responsible for anything and everything that comes from us. By imagining a situation where no one is able to question us for our actions, we realize that being anonymous is synonymous with being invisible in the contemporary world. Although, the cloak of invisibility brings out the best in Harry, in Rowling's



New Tab

universe, it nevertheless continues to be a potentially lethal object. The cloak of anonymity on internet gives us great power, and with great power comes Uncle Ben's cliched quote which, in fact, has never rung truer.

We find that, after spending staggering amount of time on social media (thanks to the free internet facilities by the government of India); people in general are rude over the internet. This could be a consequence of the step-by-step accumulation of a person's anger, when he types down the text to be uploaded. In many cases, however, the person's anonymity might be one of the reasons behind this phenomenon. Ever sat behind the wheel of a car and felt moved to scream abuse at the person in front who is slow in turning right? Or ever wondered what could possibly motivate a responsible, educated father-of-two to yell crude expletives at the opposition- words he wouldn't usually use in civilized company? It's cover of the crowd and the insides of the car that provides an alias or a security. It removes the condition of accountability and dilutes the guilt (if any). And hence, the cloak shows its lethal nature. The person in question loses self consciousness and succumbs to the animal instinct of the herd. The dam of patience gets broken and the first stone gets thrown. Anonymity, thus, like a sinful gift from Lucifer claims its victim.

News Notes

Digester in Azad Bhawan

In its wake of making IITR a more eco-friendly campus, the NSS environment cell has successfully installed the Digester at Azad Bhawan. The device would accept all the mess' vegetable discards to convert it into usable fertilizer. The cell staged an inaugural function to mark this achievement with Dr Naveen Navani (ADOSW, IIT Roorkee) and Dr Smita Jha (Chief Faculty adviser, NSS IIT Roorkee) to cut the ribbon. Dr Navani, who served as the initiator of this project in his stint of warden-ship at Azad Bhawan, explained the technical specifications of the Digester. The Digester, having a capacity of 20 kg, will accept organic waste from the Bhawan Mess. After the action of bacteria, the fertilizer shall be collected in the form of a solution in a cycle that would involve 2-3 weeks. The students would be working in close association with the Biotechnology department under Prof. Navani for experimentation and preparation of the bacterial culture as an ingredient to the Digester. With the quantity of leftover food soaring as high as 35-40 kg per meal, this project may prove to be a step closer to sustainability.

“The results of the projects would come around in a month and if successful we would, say by November, scale up the project.” said Pratik Toshniwal, deputy Gen-Sec of NSS. “The project would be entirely funded by the institute if the results prove its worth.”

The New World Order : Freemasonry at IITR

Under the guidance of the Humanities Department, several thought provoking sign boards have been installed all over the campus. These signs have a simple objective. To make the students take a moment's break from their busy lives and be conscious of the miracle of mere existence. Because when you actually observe, not superficially but in the deepest sense of the verb, you will see in the chaos around you a living breathing world, the beauty of which is just impossible for your nervous system to comprehend. The 'sublime and beautiful', as the romanticists would call it. The increasing enthusiasm in yoga classes among students and the deserting of Gaylord are just a couple of the numerous benefits sought by the admin with the introduction of these signs. These sign boards read: Rukhiye, Dekhiye, Jayiye.

Although these changes can be considered constructive ,it contradicts the image that we hold of a healthy college campus. A clean-shaven, brisk, sober and yoga-class attending engineering student seems out of place as much as a Russian will at the Milk Bar. We at Watchout! could smell something fishy and after assuring ourselves that it's not from the RJB mess, we began our investigation into what could easily be the biggest treason committed to the students here, apart from prohibiting home delivery from restaurants.

After following a long trail of paperwork and tips from several anonymous sources (which involved many TAs and several disgruntled Ph.D. scholars), our investigation was narrowed down to one person who might know something: The night-guard of Kasturba Bhawan.

“My suspicion began when late one evening, I saw a few dark mystical figures, down the road, near the Earthquake department” says R. Swayamsevak Singh, the night-guard of Kasturba Bhawan, ”At first I thought it was just a bunch of girls dressed in black trying to sneak away in the night. But after I looked closely and passed some misogynistic remarks, I realized that something was different. They didn't just run away. Instead one of them turned and started swinging a pendulum with a spiral on it in front of my face. When I asked him what he was doing, he asked me to count to ten and breathe deep. I don't remember much of what happened later. It took me a little while and a few J's to realise that I had been hypnotised.” For some time, the signs of freemasons have been quite obvious on the campus. In a way that can give buzzfeed a run for its money, we present to you the findings of our investigation: How IITR is being taken over by the New World Order supported by Freemasons?

For a long time now prominent members of the Debating Society have been spotted doing an obscure, elaborate combination of movements right in front of the hobbies club. Though one might think that this is largely due to social rejection as a result of being annoying, it might be what we assume to be some sort of a mandatory entrance ritual to a secret chamber inside. The main building was unceremoniously renamed the James ThoMASON building earlier this year. We believe that it was for a reason. A very particular reason.

And that squabble of illegible words on the top of what is possibly the most beautiful part of the campus, is a visible evidence to the Gothic sub-culture of IITR. For those who were questioning the Thomso team regarding their blog posts about our insti having a Gothic past, here is your answer. The 10 PM deadline and Rs.6 for butter. Count the number of letters in 'Masons'. And now count the number of words in 'Freemasons'. You get our point?

Disclaimer: We can assure our readers that Watch Out is not a part of this cult. We have introduced a simple Freemason-detection test as a part of our recruitment process.

We show the first year students a 100 dollar bill. If we don't have the bill with us at the end of the interview, we send them to the Finance cell. If they get turned on, we immediately know that we are dealing with the New World order. Any reference to our symbol 'W' being referred to as an inverted 'M' with the Mason's symbolic eye on top, is rubbish and a mere coincidence.

On Stranger Sites

There are two things at which IIT Roorkee is much better than its peers. The first, of course is laying new roads. The other is constructing buildings, which within years of their emergence become as obsolete as what Kapil Sibbal became after being the HRD Minister. The existence of the Thomso/Cogni office (depending on which time of the year it is) and a highly functional laboratory for the Biotechnology Department bear testimony to this hypothesis. At the same time, however, there are several places that do not appear to be as useless. No, we are not talking about the secluded spots behind Civil and Architecture Departments here. Or wait. Maybe we are.

Regardless, this is a fact that we must take down with a pinch of salt, or a shot of vodka if that be the case: *for all their relevance to our lives - most of us have never cared to bother enough about the several landmarks here in R.* We might've often seen them as a fleeting blur in the background, but it is very rarely that we have stopped to take a second glance. This is why Watch Out! brings to you the complete story behind some of the most baffling examples of modern(?) architecture here in IIT Roorkee. With the hope that the next time somebody stops and asks you the way to the erstwhile transmission tower, you are not caught like a deer in the headlights of a truck being driven by a drunk Punjabi driver. Or of Salman Khan's car.

The Tower of Gloom

Surrounded with mysterious stories, one of which hints the presence of a secret silo in its basement, we set out to find the history and purpose of this structure on campus. The caretaker from EC department explains, "When it was built around 1978-80, the plan was to install a transmitter on the tower for the purpose of microwave research. They also had necessary equipment mounted on top to facilitate it. However, the plan never worked out and ultimately the equipment was removed." He further adds on how the same experiment was taken up at BITS Pilani and was unsuccessful there as well. Luckily, they don't have a gigantic tower to boast about it.

Some civil and earthquake engineering student and professor groups have conducted research projects over the years on the structural stability of the tower. The tower was used again by Prof. R.K. Nayyar in the 1980s for mounting the telescopes so as to observe a solar eclipse. However, it now remains in a highly shoddy and unmaintained state. Unfortunately, the same can be said about the entire EC department.

One thing that stands out of the picturesque view of the main building is the EC tower. Often referred to as, "*What the hell is that?*"; one cannot easily fathom the reason for the presence of this tall structure right in the heart of R. The tower, apart from being the center of a lot of non-magazine-friendly jokes on campus, also attracts a lot of attention from unsuspecting freshmen.



EC Tower, Computer science and electronics department

The three metaphors of advancement

Taking a leap from the EC circle to the *Gaaon*, the divide between the inhabitants of this region and the rest of the campus starts becoming evident. Cut off from the Students' Club, Nescii, CBRI and other places on campus that are bustling with activity; the students in this area are often forced to spend most of their time inside their hostels. This is why as soon as reports of the construction of a Multi-Activity Centre behind *Ganga Bhawan* started flowing in- students were absolutely delighted. However, most who saw the first brick of this centre being laid have long since graduated, and the rest live in a faint hope of the structure being complete in time for their 25th Alumni Meet.

As a news note in one of our 2011 issues states, "*The four storey structure is planned to have an auditorium, a restaurant, a post office, coffee corners, food courts, shops, banks, and a bowling alley.*" The news note also promised that the construction would be complete in the next 15 months. 42 months and three *Thomso's* later- the work is yet to finish. A conversation with the project manager reveals that the much awaited M.A.C, built at a cost of over 68 crore rupees, should finally be ready by next semester. The construction phase is nearly complete and the process for issuing tenders has started.

The indoor sports centre is expected to reduce the burden on the packed UG club. The building also promises to offer rooms to various cult-soc sections for practise and meetings. The commercial centre will be home to a number of franchises providing refreshing new alternatives to *Dominos* and *Olive*. To top it all off, one of the buildings will be an indoor auditorium, accompanied by a new open air amphitheatre. If everything goes according to plan, starting next semester a desire to have a gratifying burger would no longer necessitate a trip to Pentagon.

The institute architect, Mahua Mukherjee, states that NBCC is given the tender for all construction work that happens inside the campus. It is supposed to give an entire schedule of the construction undertakings. What went wrong causing the entire project to be delayed remains unclear, and nobody from the administration is ready to answer. Perhaps, the best what we as students can do, is remain patient and hope that the M.A.C. delivers what it promises.



Proposed Model of MAC



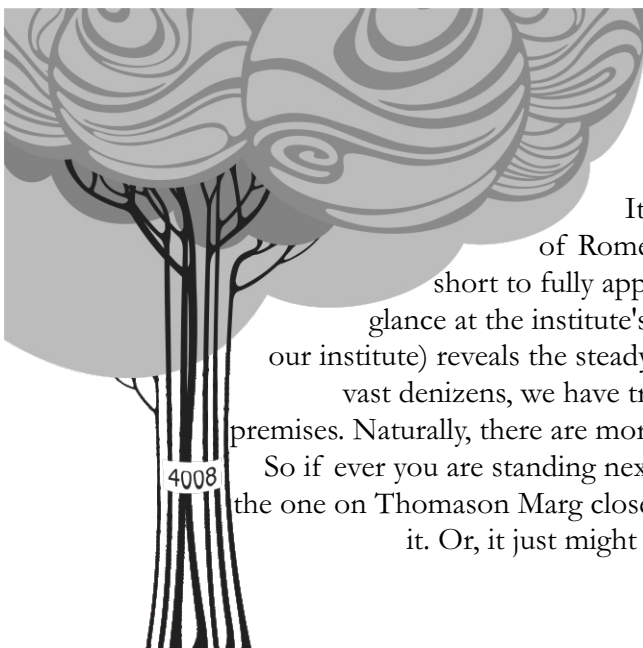
Top View of MAC

Numbered trees, Locked Gates and other peculiarities

If you ever happen to chance upon a photograph of IIT Roorkee from the 1960s, you would see that the last 50 years have seen a great deal of changes. Right from the construction of several new department buildings, bhawans and a sprawling library, to the establishment of a new lecture hall complex and a fully furnished students' club - our institute has clearly shown signs of improvement. However, what most people fail to notice are the several other changes which are slightly more difficult to explain. For example, our campus has a lot more trees now than it ever did before. While some believe that the trees, numbered in an erratic fashion, have been put in place for the promotion of Chetan Bhagat's next what he likes to call a novel: 4008 Ways to Repeat a Storyline; we'd strongly refute them as mere rumors. No book of Mr. Bhagat needs any publicity, after all.

Another unnoticeable aspect of life here in R is the presence of a vast multitude of guards and watchmen. While their contribution to our individual lives may seem to be very little, they are undoubtedly an important part of the campus. The daily guard meetings are occurrences that are almost impossible to go unnoticed by anyone who is even mildly observant. What happens in these meetings however, is an entirely different story. A conversation with one of the guards reveals that in the meetings held thrice every day, the guards are instructed about their duties and given suggestions on how to cultivate good thoughts in their minds. As anyone (read: almost everyone) who has had to stay up for the night to study for an exam would agree, staying awake without internet can be a gigantic pain in the posterior. And when you are responsible for the safety of many hundred students, staying awake and passing time during the wee hours of the night, every night of the week, is a challenging task in itself.

Capable of bringing certain humanities departmental electives to shame; questions that are often discussed in these meetings are, 'What is life?' and 'Why is family important?'. The guards are also advised to think about God, being friendly with each other, and the importance of knowing the only campus rule, "Do not step on the lawns". Apart from this intellectual erudition, the guards are also taught about certain campus spots where they need to watch out for budding lovers, and when and where they need to check for ID-cards.



Epilogue

It is said that a lifetime is not enough to fully explore the city of Rome. In a similar context, these 4-5 years of our college life fall short to fully appreciate all the strangeness this campus has to offer. A quick glance at the institute's timeline (which is now uploaded on the official website of our institute) reveals the steady pace of IITR's development. In our attempt to explore its vast denizens, we have tried to cover the major places of interest within the campus premises. Naturally, there are more mysteries to be uncovered and more myths to be busted. So if ever you are standing next to it and find the iron gate in front of the Senate Steps or the one on Thomason Marg closed, be prepared. There might be an underlying story behind it. Or, it just might be very late and you should be heading back to your hostel.

Us And Them

William Deresiewicz, essayist and literary critic created quite a stir recently by criticising Ivy League Universities for producing, from what he likes to describe the graduates as, excellent sheep. The article by William Deresiewicz paints a good picture of what college education should ideally be. Everyone is born with a mind, he writes, but it is only through introspection, observation, connecting the head and the heart, making meaning of experience and finding an organizing purpose that you build a unique individual self. This process, he argues, often begins in college, the interval of freedom when a person is away from both family and career.

During that interval, the young person can throw himself with reckless abandon at other people and learn from them. Some of these people are authors who have written great books. Some are professors who can teach intellectual rigor. Some are students who can share work that is intrinsically rewarding.

Superficially, any student or faculty in general might not find anything missing or out of the regular. Yet, the differences are visibly jarring to any student or faculty member who have had a stint in other institutes. It is difficult to ascertain whether the blame lies on the students for their mere resume-building approach to college coupled with the lack of genuine curiosity in their core, or on the complacency on part of the professors. Mayhaps both augment the other. Watch Out! News Agency sets out to investigate the non-existent student-faculty interactions and ascertain the why and how.

The Ordinary Classroom Experience

An ordinary lecture in any given ordinary day of an ordinary student at IIT R involves an hour long confrontation with audio and visual continuum of hypnosis inducing information (as claimed by numerous anonymous students). The kind of slides used in our lectures are nothing like the ones conceived to turn routine lectures into interesting demonstrations. There are, however, some professors who still have their faith intact in the old chalk to black-board approach. There are many students who are more comfortable with this than the stale approach of powerpoint presentation. "Things get faster to grasp once the professors pick up a chalk and start explaining on the board" adds Aman Kedia, CSE 3rd year, "By that you get ample time to make notes and even feel free to ask a doubt in between."

Even so, there is not much scope in terms of the pedagogy involved, as the student faculty ratio takes care of that. According to a report in a newspaper that appreciates the beauty of the nature TOI, the government stipulates that the IITs must have a teacher-student ratio of 1:10. While the average is 1:15, IIT Roorkee has the largest student faculty ratio at 1:20. Since recruiting faculty is a rigorous process, only a limited number of faculty can be hired every year. Although efforts are being taken by the institute, it is envisaged to take about 10 years to reach the optimum student faculty ratio. There are a few exceptions to it. Passing the buck to the student faculty ratio will however not move us an inch towards a better classroom experience. Asst. Prof. Balasubramanian, Computer Science Department explains why. "The students are hesitant to ask questions in the classroom initially," says the professor from CS department. "They must be open with the teacher and ask questions whenever they have any doubt. In order to avoid any communication gap I have made myself accessible to students by email and a facebook group. Out of my 3 hour lecture class per week, I keep half an hour for interaction with the students." Prof. Balasubramanian sets a great example on behalf of the faculty members, in ensuring that students don't hesitate while studying their courses. Efforts in a similar vein in our institute will promise to improve the effectiveness of classroom education.

Bridging the Gap

A significant number of researches indicate that informal interaction of students with the faculty can go a long way. This interaction can play a substantial role in deciding the professional aspirations of the student along with several other academics related parameters. However cliched this piece of information may be, in a civilization like ours, our teachers play a dominant role in determining our identities.

“There is a small jump in the level of studies when someone begins with engineering. The system has evolved in such a way that it is necessary to understand the fundamentals of science before actual engineering starts” Prof. D.K. Nauriyal, the Dean of Students' Welfare, remarked when asked about a certain disconnect of the students in with academics. “It is very crucial for the students to remain patient through this period so as to become a good engineer.” According to Prof. Nauriyal, this is the same reason students start to lose interest in the studies from the very beginning.

Earlier this semester, Prof. Nauriyal mentioned in an interview with WONA that the institute is going to initiate, on a trial basis, a system of Faculty mentors for a small group of students. “We are going to monitor them closely and take weekly reports from the students and faculty about their performance. We will counsel them if they are still on the weaker side. Right now, we're doing this for all the students who have a backlog and we'll be extending this for all academically weak students later”, adds the DOSW. A group of 4-5 professors will mentor about 15-20 students each. However it is unclear on when the programme will be initiated. Even though, this idea may appear to be in its nascent stage, it is a step closer in the right direction. “A mentorship program should be initiated in accordance with the student-teacher ratio” Dr. Jogendra Nayak, from Department Of Management Studies, remarks, “Students are far away from their families. Role of the teachers is not only teaching, first is guidance. For a good counselling cell, from every department, one or two faculty members with adequate emotional quotient should be nominated.” WatchOut also believes that a formal programme for the first year undergraduate students can be envisioned where the students get a chance to know the professors from their departments. Once the ice is thawed, the students will be much more motivated to approach their professors for academic or non academic related queries.

To Research and beyond

Research is one of the key areas where any Institute's contribution to the society can be measured. One of the certain ways to measure the quality of research in any Institute is to look at what the numbers have to say. According to Professor Anand Bulusu, sponsored research in our institute is 1/8th of the average of IIT-B, K, M and Kgp. In terms of the numbers stand par with the the older IITs. Even though the number of Ph.D. students have increased substantially in the institute in the past few years, the state of undergraduate research remains an area where all the IITs face challenges..

Many students are eager to engage in research but it is a case where expectations belie reality. Professor Anand Bulusu, ECE Department shines some light to this aspect. “Undergraduate Research requires patience and time to build background. Students often lose interest and stop research abruptly.” says Prof. Bulusu. “As a consequence, Professors become highly selective in handing out research projects. A program like URA (IITB) needs to be implemented here too wherein the students are academically awarded for their research efforts.”

To those who are not aware, Society for Promotion of Undergraduate Research (SPUR) of IIT Bombay is the organization that has smoothened out the whole process for interested students. Undergraduate research programme (URA) in IIT Bombay. It consists of three categories of awards:

- URA 01 : It is a non-credit project that can be undertaken before the fourth year. It gets further reflected on a student's resume.
- URA 02 : Awarded for B Tech Projects (BTP). Bonus 6 credits are also awarded.
- URA 03 : Awarded for Dual Degree Project (DDP). Bonus 6 credits are also awarded.

The state of undergraduate research would improve to a great extent if such program is initiated in IITR. Some appreciation and a pat in the back would not be amiss in case of the students achieving something significant in research inspite of a demanding curriculum.

The Great Debate

The debate on the significance of 75% attendance rule has been going on for a long time. Since its inception, arguments, both for and against, have been laid down and battled upon on all the possible student forums. The rule still stands tall in IITR and also lays the foundation of a lot of possible disciplinary actions against students. Needless to say, *proxy* is the second most popular word in IITR after *chapo*.

Prof. P. Sateesh Kumar, head of ACM-IIT Roorkee Chapter, has another view on the whole debate. "Classroom provides the best platform for interaction and it is this interaction that gives depth to an engineer's mind. Students should not miss classes at any cost." In general, it is observed that irregularity on behalf of the students in lectures, gives a negative feedback to the teacher in question. It further gets reflected in the grading process and hence hampers the overall performance for the students. Most importantly, it destroys the understanding between the teacher and students and further increases the distrust. Some students might give arguments against the rule, pertaining to the nature of the subject, personal interest and methods of teaching adopted by teacher. The effect of their words, sadly, gets neglected due to a few cases of insincerity on behalf of certain students. "In many cases we see the students themselves are reluctant to indulge into studies", counters Supratim Dey, 3rd Year GT. "There are students who do not ask doubts or attend classes for that matter in a class, even after a professor's motivation. We cannot simply blame it on the teacher." Whatever the conclusion of this debate may be, the 75% attendance rule is a reality. Its implementation, however, remains subject to the professor in question. As a consequence, at the end of a semester, a substantial number of students can be found pestering the profs for leniency in this rule to prevent a back.

The Road Ahead

Criticism can never be an approach to tackle any problem. To put things in perspective, our institute is a great place with a myriad congregation of individuals (be it professors, students or alumni). The interactions between them leads to exchange of powerful ideas on which an institution such as ours stand. The disciplines of science and engineering have evolved through this very process of discourse. We have tried to address the underlying issues that creates distrust between the teachers and students. This distrust is highly unacceptable as it gets reflected in activities that are beyond academics and demand an understanding between the students and the professors. *Deresiewicz's* idea of college education may be too utopian for IITR's taste but with efforts from both the sides, we can make a better environment for learning and excellence here.

Taekwondo IITR shines at the National Level



This year 2 students from IIT Roorkee Puneet Kumar – ECE 4th Year and Jyoti Chopra -Chemical 3rd Year, represented the Uttarakhand state team in National Taekwondo (Poomsae) Championship, the 7th Senior National Poomsae Championship held at the Sawai Man Singh Stadium, Jaipur. The students departed on 31st August for the tournament that was to commence on 2nd. “Competing with the players at national level. We got to see the defined and perfect tactics and beauty of Taekwondo in players from all the Indian states, services, defense etc.”, the winning players remarked. There were 3 rounds in each category: preliminary, semifinal and final. Out of all states and services teams, only top 12 are selected for semi-finals and then top 8 in semi-finals make it to the finals. Jyoti Chopra (B.Tech III yr, Chem.) participated in the senior girls (under 30) individual category and made it to the finals. Also, Puneet Kumar (B.Tech IV yr, ECE) and Jyoti Chopra participated in pair poomsae and finished 6th out of 24 state teams and some services teams like I.T.B.P. Though Uttarakhand could not get any medal in the nationals this year, but such a performance of Uttarakhand after a long time was highly appreciated. The team accredited the coach Mr. Anand Krishna Yadav, Black belt (6th dan), International Referee and 2011 5th Commonwealth Taekwondo Championship Bronze medalist, for the remarkable performance. Despite having an excellent result to show at the state and national levels, the sport of Taekwondo remains a neglected entity in IITR. The team still practices with their excellent coach in the garden behind the Saraswati Mandir. Some concrete changes on behalf of the administration are necessary to facilitate efficient training of the players. This should begin by providing them with a covered space with proper equipments and safety support.

EUNOIA: Slam Poetry at Thomso 2014

“And now I write poems with spaces between them. Spaces, which I never intend to fill.”

In the dimly lit Bose Auditorium, poetry lovers of several colleges assembled to listen to Mildly Offensive Content, a Delhi based slam poetry group of five girls. Organised by Kshitij-The Literary Magazine, the event was conducted in the cool, dusky afternoon of Day 1 at Thomso. Slam poetry is a form of contemporary art that uses various oratory techniques to assist the audience in the visualisation of the images presented.

Seemingly insignificant memories of childhood to the fallacy of a relationship, they enunciated their views on wonderful range of topics. Politics played its own painted pomp, with a daring creation on the Gujarat riots and the ‘man with a orange heart’ who talks about progress and development. One of the beautiful poets went on to speak of the absurdity of a job interview, resonating soundly with the audience. Vivid and personal imagery was prevalent in all of the pieces, and while we yearned for more, the show sadly came to an end. The candid verses combined with the mesmerising delivery made for a mildly offensive, yet impressive content indeed.

The audience of IITR, maybe due to the ambience created inside the Bose Auditorium or simply because of the nature of the poetry, showed a unique maturity. With clicks and snaps to the lines that hit them, the crowd encouraged the poets as well as made the atmosphere warmer. “Poetry, and that too of this level was quite unexpected out here” one of the listeners, Riddhi, from Shivaji College, DU, remarked. The whole event was very well organised by the Co-ordinators, Abhishek Jha and Bhavnoor Singh, and all the co-coordinators and

Partha Sen, CEO (FuzzyLogix)

Mr Partha Sen, an IIT Roorkee alumnus, completed his Majors in Computer Science and Minors in Mathematics from IITR in the year 1990. Right after college he worked with TATA Consultancy Services before joining the Bank of America. He entered the world of entrepreneurship after founding Fuzzy Logix in 2007. For a period of about 12 years from 1995 to 2007, Mr.Sen has pursued this passion as a hobby and developed about 100 algorithms and over 700 quantitative models. These algorithms and models are the basis for the solutions being implemented by Fuzzy Logix today. Recently he visited IITR, offering internships and placement offers for the students. We got an opportunity to talk to him about his return, future plans and life, in-general. In conversation with Mr. Sen:

How does it feel to be back here?

Great! I am taken aback by the lush greenery and cleanliness of the campus. A lot of new things have come up in the campus. The greatest establishment would be the MGM library and various hostels for the students and the teachers. It felt good to see the new placement office and the Department for Management Studies. The thing that I found quite remarkable was that even the soothing environment of the college is intact.

Tell us something about the placement process and your plans.

Well, we are here to offer jobs and internships. The applicants for the internships will be selected now while those for jobs have been shortlisted and will be further reviewed in another visit planned in December. I am glad to say that the quality of students which have applied is outstanding. Regarding our plans, we will also be recruiting from IIT Kanpur this year. We had a meeting with the Director of IITR and we promised our co-operation for the propagation of Data Science as a subject in the college. We have opened our doors for internships and even guest lectures, if there's a need.

How do you compare the students from IITs and other foreign institutes?

We have been recruiting from US, of course and I feel that what sets the students of IITs apart is the willingness to learn, the motivation and dedication. As a matter of fact this holds true for all the good institutions in India. I am not saying the students abroad lack this but the peculiar 'fire in the belly' is fundamental to a student in IIT. There are also a few



shortcomings when we talk of a student in India. Firstly, the level of independent and free thinking is below the mark and this is the sphere where the Americans get an edge. Secondly, a certain mediocrity exists in presentation of oneself. If you are working in a firm you must be able to speak reasonably fluent English irrespective of your background. This particular quality is prerequisite for working in a global economy.

What was the glitch in the process because of which placement for your firm was not carried out in this college the previous year?

You people weren't responsive. There are alumni of this institute who are at the top benches in a number of

firms. If proper relations are maintained then not only such sort of malfunctions can be avoided but also many job opportunities can be ensured to the graduates of this institute. Alumni relations needs to be strengthened by keeping record of all the alumni in a directory. Even getting in touch with them via phone and mail or exchanging greetings on festivals can help in the maintenance of good relations! The next year would mark the silver jubilee of the batch of 1990 and I don't see any work being done by the alumni relations cell to mark that event. You ought to use such an event to demonstrate the institute's accomplishments to the alumni who are placed at a very suitable position in their companies. The alumni would hence realise the need and worth of the students and might actually consider helping the students. Relations can never be one sided. If you want to have good alumni relations you need to put in a great deal of effort.

Quitting the Bank of America for your entrepreneurial pursuit would have been a difficult decision to make? Can you describe your journey?

The decision wasn't tough because it had been decided ever since I left college. The reason it took it so long to come up is that I wasn't from a very rich family and had to accumulate some wealth to come up with a business of my own. Today young entrepreneurs can secure venture capital and get investors interested. But back then the public sector and PSUs were booming and with these

kinds of projects, investors were a hard fish to catch. Entrepreneurship is not everyone's cup of tea. It requires a great deal of sacrifice and never keeps up to its promises of glory. To understand the journey, assume that that you take a test and you score 97. You are happy to score high but then the teacher offers to give you a 100 under the condition that you have to work another 80 hours and you shall be awarded half a mark and then you will have to work for another 160 hours to score the next half mark. If you are thinking of turning that offer down, don't be an entrepreneur!

Do you think it was easy to be an entrepreneur in America than it would have been if you were in India?

Most definitely. The social stigma prevalent here in India prevents you to open an enterprise. Also, people are hesitant to work in startups while the condition is quite different on the other side of the globe. This is an environment India should cultivate. Would you like to give a message to the young entrepreneurs of this institute? My message to them would be that you have a dream then you should not give up. Firms like Azim Premji Foundation and TATA Venture Capital provides funding to the business ideas. Hence, if you have good ideas and a sincere attitude, you have plenty of chances to rise up. So, just seize the day! Most importantly the companies today invest not in idea but in the man. You have to prove that you have the substance to achieve what you set out to achieve.

Veni. Natavi. Vici.

20 gold medals, 5 championship trophies, countless laps in the swimming pool and a smile that could make your day, Nivedita Sharma, is probably the greatest athlete IIT Roorkee has seen in recent years. Clearly, after her recent performance in the inter-IIT aquatics meet at IIT Bombay has rendered the name of this column as a misnomer: She's famous. In her final year at the Saharanpur campus, she managed to spare a few minutes out of conundrum created by placement season and approaching exams, for us. In conversation with Nivedita Sharma, the lady behind IITR's fifth consecutive trophy in the Inter-IIT aquatics meet:

WONA: Well, we'll begin with a cliched question. Your first crush?

NS: It was one of my seniors, Abhimanyu Lamba. He was a karate champion and the topper of his branch. He was really nice to me and was quite good looking too.

WONA: If he reads the interview, he'll probably be quite disappointed in himself for not knowing.

NS: No, I dated him for quite a while.

WONA: Which has been your most memorable Inter IIT and why?

NS: Every Inter IIT has been memorable. Every time we get to make new friends across colleges and also there are new entrants to the team. Each time is unique. For example, when we went to Guwahati, it was a very different atmosphere and when it was in Roorkee, we had the home ground. There were factors that made both of these special.

WONA: Among all the swimmers you have met in all the inter-IITs which is the one swimmer that you admire the most?

NS: That'd be Akshay Krishna from IIT Madras. The amazing thing about him is that he's an Olympiad Medallist in Astronomy and he's also the topper of his branch Engineering Physics in IIT Madras. His AIR was in 200s and he also qualified for Asian Games, representing our country. He's probably the God of Inter IIT swimming.



At this point the interviewer stops the interview for a few minutes to introspect on what exactly he's doing with his life. The interview resumes with an uneasy feeling in his stomach which is somehow associated with shame

WONA: Alright, so what are your views on sports culture and sports facilities here, with respect to students and sports authorities separately?

NS: When I came to IIT Roorkee, I was quite surprised to see that we actually have so many sport facilities. Back in Mumbai (Mumbai being a very crowded city), it is very difficult to find a 50 meter swimming pool. Even when you find one the timings there are very strict and the lanes are very crowded. So, I was very glad to come here. The facilities here are much better than what I had seen previously.

WONA: How did you manage your time between Saharanpur and Roorkee, since Saharanpur campus doesn't have a pool for practising?

NS: I used to come and practice extensively a week before the Inter IIT. When I came here I had been practicing every single day for the past sixteen to eighteen years of my life. So I didn't really feel the need to practice regularly.



The interviewer is clearly awestruck when he is humbly reminded that he's talking to a national level swimmer who has participated in Nationals several times and almost snatched a medal there as well

WONA: About the Saharanpur Campus issue, do you think the students are kept disadvantaged and hence it should be shifted here and merged with the main campus?

NS: Definitely. Talking about any facility, what makes the IIT's unique is the interdepartmental culture and the fact that there are so many facilities apart from academics. The disadvantage there is that we have only three departments and hence we don't get a chance to interact the professors and students of other departments. Suppose somebody wants to undertake a project that stretches over Polymers and Mechanical or Algorithms, then they're at a loss. Even for sports, the campus is too small to accommodate all the facilities there. The travelling becomes quite hectic. So yes. I think it would be convenient if the campus gets shifted.

WONA: What is the one thing about campus that you will really miss after you graduate?

NS: I'll miss the amount of free time that we have in college. I'll miss the whole culture, how all the sport facilities and residential areas are inside the campus itself together with the academic blocks. And definitely, I will miss the people I have met here.

WONA: Most people know you as an awesome swimmer which kind of defines your identity everywhere. What are the things apart from swimming that you do?

NS: There was a time in my life when I had an identity crisis that I'm nothing else but a swimmer. But that time is long gone. Here I'm fine with academics. I'm the department topper. I'm good at painting too. (We were surprised to know that there was a time when she wanted to drop engineering and join an arts school)

WONA: Your views/advice/suggestions to WONA?

NS: You guys are cool. With WONA there's always a little spice in life. I would suggest you keep up with the good work. (Yes ma'am!)

The Dean of Students' Welfare, IITR

It's been two months in the Autumn Semester and IITR has already seen a lot of interesting changes on the campus: A new Bhawan allotment policy (that made election candidates cry), the newly elected Students' Affairs Council and an innovative regime of punishment (read: yoga classes). Watch Out! News Agency thanks Prof. D.K. Nauriyal, the Dean of Students' Welfare, IIT Roorkee, for sparing some of his precious time and explaining IITR administration's point of view, pertaining to the much debated topics of this semester.



Watch Out: Why was there a departure from the old Bhawan allotment policy?

DOSW: During the vacations, all the bhawans were being run, all the messes were operational and we did not have any breathing space. We were not able to restrict the students to one or two bhawans and carry out the repair and maintenance process. We also found that there was very little and unproductive interaction between the B.Tech, M.Tech and the PhD students. Hence we concluded that this arrangement was not academically beneficial for the students. So that's why we had to go back to the old system. Prior to the time when the University of Roorkee became IIT Roorkee, this system was quite successful.

Watch Out: After the allotment policy, there were many cases of students shifting from one bhawan to another to be with their friends and peer groups, which were mainly their branch mates. Don't you think the new policy created a lot of chaos?

DOSW: The students must understand that apart from their Bhawan room numbers, we simply do not have any way of tracking them. It's true that they have been allotted bhawans a bit randomly and there have been some issues. What the residents should realize is that their activities put us in a tight position. For instance, if there is a room locked up for three consecutive days and the student doesn't even turn up for the mess facilities, then what do we presume? These are matters of great concern for us. After all, as the custodians, we must see their well-being and help them out with their problems. But that would be impossible if we do not have any system of knowing where to find them.

Watch Out: Students did change bhawans. Can we conclude that they were not happy with their allotted rooms?

DOSW: Some kind of discontentment will always be there. These buildings have come up at different points in time, and have different provisions. The newer constructions are desired more by the students. There's a possibility that the room allotted to them may not be of their liking and as a result they take such steps. Students should realize that the institute has certain constraints and the rooms are allotted keeping all those in mind. I must add, the students actually cooperated a lot in this whole process. In fact, quite a few came to us with their problems and we did not just chuck them out. We did not agree to the shifting of bhawans but we sat down and discussed it with them. They were eventually convinced.

Watch Out: For the first time, third year girls were allotted twin sharing rooms. What are your views on that?

DOSW: There is a shortage of accommodation for girls, we have only two hostels. It is just because of this reason that we had to allot them with twin sharing rooms. A lot of rooms in KB can't be used due to moisture, etc and the students cannot be allotted those rooms due to their poor conditions. There is a similar case with Sarojini Bhawan.

Watch Out: Could you tell us something about the new regime of punishment which involves morning Yoga classes for students?

DOSW: It is very easy to punish the students with the kind of system we have in place. It is easy to suspend students and deduct their marks. But does it really reform them? We discussed a lot on the topic and after that we came around the view that we must give the student an opportunity to mend ways, if something is not desirable. We are also aware that many students on campus indulge in drug and alcohol abuse. Punishing them won't do them any good and would in-turn jeopardize their career. The most plausible and least undesirable way would be to put them to Yoga classes. The idea is to make them realize that they have to accept the community norms. Yoga would help them gear up for the day as well as teach them better ways to live their lives. Parents have also supported us in this.

Watch Out: How can we develop a friendlier culture like that in foreign universities in terms of Student-Faculty relations?

DOSW: We are going to initiate, on a trial basis, a system of Faculty mentors for a small group of students. A group of 4-5 professors will mentor about 15-20 students each. They would guide them, help them and take their problems to the authorities. Another thing that we have in mind is to come up with a system for academically weak students, especially for those who have an extended stay. We are going to monitor them closely and take weekly reports from the students and faculty about their performance. We will counsel them if they are still on the weaker side. So we'll have a continuous tracking system. We're doing this for all the students who have a backlog right now and we'll be extending this for all academically weak students later.

Watch Out: What are your expectations from the new SAC?

DOSW: We need good support and cooperation from them. We also need them to come up with innovative ideas for bhawans on how can they be maintained and improved. We also expect them to be a part of us in monitoring the mess facilities. SAC should come up with creative methods and ways to improve the existing system rather than just running it.

Watch Out: The students in IITR come from different backgrounds, some of which have a lot of cohesiveness among them. What do you think about the pseudo party system going around in the campus prior to the elections?

DOSW: I personally do not subscribe to those kind of things. The students have to be one community. A community shouldn't get bifurcated into segments. Truly, our institute has a lot of diversity but it exists everywhere in this world. The students should value their individual judgement over the pressure and representation which these segments have to offer. They must understand and value their identities and make decisions individually rather than going with the flow.

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