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Facebook hires IIT-Delhi student for ₹65 lakh a year

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NEW DELHI: Social networking site Facebook will now have an employee from the Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi.

After trying — and failing — to recruit students from the institute last year, Facebook came back to the campus this year and chose 21-year-old Ankur Dahiya, a student of computer science engineering.

Dahiya’s annual salary package is around ₹65 lakh.

“Ever since I heard Facebook would come to recruit, I wanted to get in. It was a long-standing dream. My parents were obviously elated,” said Dahiya, who belongs to Rohtak in Haryana.

This is the first time that Facebook has recruited a student from IIT-Delhi. The social networking giant had hired a student from IIT-Chennai last year.

The company, started in February 2004, has scouted for talent at many other IIT campuses in India this year. Unlike last year when it hired only two students from India, Facebook is eyeing the country as a talent hub this time around.

Dahiya will be placed in Palo Alto, California as a programmer after he finishes his course next year.

“The interview and the test were completely subject-based. They asked me to do some encoding and programming,” said Dahiya, whose all-India rank in the IIT-JEE exam was 56.

Facebook was unable to hire any student last year as they expressed a desire to come to the campus a tad too late. This time around, however, they were in the first batch of employers.
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A salary package as high as ₹20 lakh for Delhi students

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NEW DELHI: The placement season at IIT-Delhi this year has defied recession. Day one saw 25 companies and 180 job offers. Last year, 19 companies had recruited students on the first day.

Companies such as Facebook, Opera, Microsoft, Tower, McKinsey, Bain and Google are a few big names that have queued up to hire students.

Ankur Daihiya, who has chosen to work for Facebook next year, was also offered jobs from Tower and Google, both multinational companies.

But the offer that Daihiya has got is not the biggest one anticipated in the campus. A multinational firm that will be coming to the campus the next month is offering a package of ₹90 lakh per annum.

At DU as well, a few big companies have shown their presence. For the first time, Uniqlo, a Japanese apparel giant, has come to the Central Placement Cell of the university and is looking to hire large number of students. “They are offering a good package, around ₹20 lakh per annum, to students. The first round of their process is over,” said Gulshan Sawhney, deputy dean, students’ welfare.

This year, DU placement cell has received 21,189 online registrations from 121 colleges, institutes and departments. In colleges, too, the response has been good. The placement process has kicked off in most colleges, with regulars like Google, McKinsey, Bain, etc., conducting tests and interviews.

At Shri Ram College for Commerce, a student has already been offered a job with a package of ₹10 lakh per annum. This figure is set to rise soon as the placements have been interrupted by semester-end exams. “We expect much better offers soon. Better offers start to roll in by December-January and by that time even students know what they want to pursue,” said a teacher at SRCC who did not want to be named.
What ails our universities

The crisis in Indian education demands a revival of intellectual traditions that created the J. C. Boses and the C. V. Ramans. To focus merely on the physical infrastructure of universities is to miss the point.

There is a tendency to judge a university by its brick-and-mortar status.

CONCEPTUAL CONFUSION

This distinction should be evident at the very first stage of deciding the objectives of a policy towards the two elites. It is quite possible to build a moral case to reduce economic inequality, even if that means placing limits on how rich the elite can be.

In the case of the intellectual elite, on the other hand, success is defined in terms of increasing inequality with those at the top of the ideas pyramid being far above those at the bottom. Even as it is perfectly legitimate for the economic realm to operate on the principle of growth with equity, the principles governing the intellectual realm could well seek intellectual inequality.

Ideally, the two realms should have their own internal dynamics. In the economic realm the objective would be economic gain and success would be rewarded with economic benefit. It is perfectly logical to determine the success of an Infosys by the economic value of its shares. Correspondingly, in the intellectual realm the objective would be intellectual breakthroughs and the rewards would be peer recognition.

The two realms are of course not completely independent of each other. Those with greater economic resources can afford a better education. Similarly, it is not inconceivable that those with a better education will have a head start in the world of business, especially in the knowledge industries. It would also be quite valid for the government to help those deprived in the economic and social realm to gain a foothold in the realm of education, whether this is done through scholarships or reservation.

But the trouble arises when these interconnections influence the internal dynamics of the two realms. Just as the economic realm will collapse if its members placed support from their peers above actual material gain, the intellectual realm would fail if its members sought only economic gain rather than peer recognition for their intellectual contributions.

BEYOND INFRASTRUCTURE

Unfortunately in India several factors have contributed to the internal dynamics of the economic realm taking over the functioning of the intellectual realm. Arguably, the most important of these factors is the tendency, officially and otherwise, to judge a university by its brick-and-mortar status. The granting of significant amounts of land is treated as the starting point of an intellectual institution, on which is built an often elaborate physical infrastructure.

The extent and quality of this infrastructure makes command over it an attractive goal for individuals. This contributes to administrative control over the infrastructure becoming a legitimate reward for intellectual achievement. Over time the best intellectuels prefer an administrative role over academic one. And these roles are available, as the best academic institutions often prefer someone with great academic credentials as their directors, rather than those with administrative credentials. While the best academics may have the ability to take on an administrative role, the shifting of the new role improves the intellectual space.

Our best intellectuels often take such great effort to create large infrastructure-rich institutions that their intellectual achievements have sometimes fallen behind. As a result the intellectual value of any recognition they offer to their peers is also diluted. Peer recognition must then come from abroad, particularly the West. As a result these academics that are capable of getting peer recognition, and seek no other benefit, fairly frequently prefer to migrate to Western universities.

Even those who stay behind and continue to seek peer recognition are forced to find this recognition by researching questions that are important to Western universities. This can be a fairly significant constraint in the Social Sciences, where the chances of finding something new would be greater if academics focused on addressing the local experience with the confidence to develop their own concepts. By choosing instead to primarily borrow from Western theories, Indian researchers often reduce themselves to becoming, directly or indirectly, mere data gatherers for Western theorists.

With the scope for pure intellectual achievement getting further reduced, the administrative role becomes even more attractive. And as administration draws an ever increasing number of the country's best brains, the next generation becomes even more dependent on Western academia for peer recognition. Over time this increases the pressure on students as well.

If going abroad to study was primarily a higher education option earlier, it is now being considered at the undergraduate level as well.

It is not clear that the initiatives that are now being planned will do anything to break this vicious cycle. Allowing a greater role for foreign universities in India will only further increase the role of Western peer recognition. It will be no surprise if these universities come here solely with the intention of tapping the economic resources that Indians now have to spend on education.

The crisis in Indian education demands a revival of intellectual traditions that created the J. C. Boses and the C. V. Ramans, and not a strengthening of the administrative control of intellectual activity.

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Universities need cash, but not just anyone’s

Pulp Notes

These are hard times for universities, and the Woolf Report into the conduct of the LSE is not going to make things any easier. Funding is drying up from public sources, and they are having to turn to the public. For some of the institutions, it was a no brainer in the first year of the recession, but with the problems continuing, and payment from students on hold, this is the year to have the student paying back fees. The only way they can do this is if the students pay back the £3,000 in fees that they have already paid in the last year.

Universities will be competing in a market as never before. They will have to answer to their students as they were customers, as well as to their role customers, the employers in the job market. For a long time, I would say, some universities have been going out of business due to the evident quality of their product compared with the shocking cost of their service. If a sandwich shop consistently serves stale bread and poisoned potatoes, then you don’t accept it as an inferior lunch over a period of time. You throw it in the bin and go next door. If a university promises to hand you £3,000 worth of education, fails to provide you with an education, and leaves you at an inept disadvantage to someone who had the nous — many employers’ eyes — to get a job straight from school, then they probably deserve to go out of business.

In this incredibly crowded market, there is no room for complacency. That is the primary aim in maintaining standards, and is all they need to sustain their place in the market. That is the case of Oxford and Cambridge, but it is hard to see how it could apply to universities near the bottom of the feeding chain.

They make their mark in whatever way they can. The usual method of getting your institution’s name in the paper is by giving a random passingacon,

celebrity an honorary degree long since became a joke. The University of East London gave Graham Gooch, a former captain of the West Indies cricket team, an Honorary DCL in Civil Law. Someone who plays Denis Compton is a Doctor of Civil Law is not so far-fetched. Clearly, what universities need is money. If they can’t be sure about public funding any longer, and the behaviour of the student market is unpredictable, then it is only natural for them to try to diversify the sources of income. And if the cost of such diversification is a lowering of ethical standards? Well, you can imagine universities saying quietly to themselves in the future that ethical standards are a lot we can’t afford any more.

In 2002, as the Woolf Report shows, Oxford had an interesting phone call from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Blair government wanted to mount a diplomatic offensive with the goal of getting the US to sign the International Convention against Torture. As a major contribution to that campaign, which would lead to a successful meeting in a tent in the desert two years later, would Oxford care to be helpful? Would it care, for instance, to admit the dictator’s son Saif as a student? These events have been made public as an addendum to the Woolf Report written by Professor Vivian Firth, of the University of Oxford. Now, anyone could see that the answer to this question ought to have been “No”, and, from Professor Firth, that it always would have been. His memory was that brazenly liberal novelist Penelope Fitzgerald, and a former prime minister Ronald Knox. There could be no lack of moral clarity from these sources over whether it was right or not to admit Saif in exchange for favours, and the dictator’s son went elsewhere.

To LSE, in fact, where the institution was perfectly happy to accept Saif, knowing that £1m was going to be donated to Saif’s personal charity. Saif was given a docete to work which seems unlikely to be his ever. A £2m contract was awarded to LSE Enterprise to work in Libya, The Director of the LSE, Sir Howard Davies, was appointed Blair’s personal envoy to Libya.

No one, until Gadoffi started to look likely to fall, seems to have thought this through. The dictator, donations, government contracts and standards of learning are all questionable. The frightening thing is that this has been done without a dicussion. Who are the standards of learning? Probably you will never know, exactly, but they are the unspoken rules of a changing world. The only way to maintain them is to maintain standards, which is all they need to sustain their place in the market. That is good news for Oxford and Cambridge, but it is hard to see how it could apply to universities near the bottom of the feeding chain.
'Our role as educators is in question'

Even as enrolment to business programmes in the US has dropped sharply, B-schools should take a proactive approach to the problem, says Srikant Datar

Chandu Nair

Dr Srikant Datar is Arthur Lowes Dickson Professor of Business Administration and Senior Associate and Director of Research at Harvard Business School. The gold medalist from IIM (A) is quizzed by fellow IIM post-grad, Chandu Nair, for The New Manager. Rethinking the MBA. Business Education at a Crossroads, co-authored by Datar with David A Garvin and research associate Patrick G Cullen, sets the tone for the conversation. Excerpt:

Why are B-schools at the crossroads? Have the old drivers (namely great placements, promotions, higher social prestige, corporate acceptance) disappeared or changed? Is it true only in countries such as the US or even everywhere? For example, developing nations like India?

In the US, there has been a steep decline in enrolments — it is down by 25-50 per cent in many B-schools, especially in the full-time programme, there is a steeper fall. The key reason — a decline in the value added by an MBA degree. The opportunity cost is high as is the cost of doing the MBA while the returns are not commensurate. Plus, student engagement is dropping.

Our view is that even if enrolments have not decreased, our role as educators is in question. Are we doing the best job, are we giving the best skills to equip the students? We shouldn’t be reactive, we need to be proactive now.

A comment you make — the students who come for full-time MBAs today are not engaged with the academic curriculum.

Why is that?

This is a hypothesis only. It is a multidimensional complex problem. Students primarily seem to want to get credentials and build networks and connections. Narrowly, as an educator, our question is — can we do something to increase engagement? Have we taken this great talent and focused on building knowledge and character with competencies? How do we (as managers) develop empathy if we don’t know what the people we lead are living? We are very far on this dimension.

Think about what Gandhiji did — he had to understand what appealed to the masses, and lived among them. (Note: Datar is a self-confessed Gandhian acolyte.)

We make all sorts of assumptions and react our often ineffectual responses. Similarly, for the last 50 years, why did B-schools emphasise analytics, models, and statistics to the detriment of softer disciplines? Is it because their key recruiters were from say the financial services, consulting, businesses which valued such skills and traits (analytical, logical, clear-cut, right or wrong binary thinking)?

The top 14-15 B-schools in the US are by and large insulated from the decline. We looked at the placement data – 70-80 per cent are going to financial services and consulting, all advisory kinds of positions. These recruiters won’t go beyond these top schools. The boom in the financial services industry has helped these top schools.

We quote from the NBER (The National Bureau of Economic Research) study in our book. They track salaries of different professions over time. In the 1920s, the financial services industry salaries were way out of line. In 1995 again, they were out of whack compared to the other professions. This is not true of other professions, say, medicine. The top 15-20 B-schools (in the US) need not change their profile or placement focus; however, the others have to and can’t really afford to imitate them.

Why do you think a large set of unmet needs — in areas such as leadership development, skill at critical, creative, and integrative thinking, and understanding organisational realities, have not been tackled for so long?

The rest of the B-schools first tried to imitate the top B-schools, but that does not work. Even if you understand needs, developing a curriculum to meet those needs is very tough. The trouble is that for education, there are no good market signals or data to let you know there’s a problem. The reaction time is slow too. Our book examines those who did a good job. We went out of the business school ambit and looked at things such as leadership — Center for Creative Leadership or design — the School of Design.

Isn’t the Indian context for management education very different? What are the key gaps in schools in India? What can schools here in India do to close the gap?

The context here in India is quite different. We have to be innovative in our solutions. Distance learning technologies can help with respect to the issue of faculty shortage and also in enhancing the quality of education imparted. We must get away from the premise that only PhDs make good teachers. For e.g. the Great Lakes Institute of Management (GLIM, Chennai) delivers all kinds of value using other faculty — the number of PhDs is only 12! We need to extend the pool of faculty as also look at technology and alternate approaches to pedagogy.

You indicate that ‘The single strongest theme we heard in our interviews was the need for MBA students to cultivate greater self-awareness’. Isn’t this in many ways a harking back to the spiritual traditions of old? Aren’t we revisiting ‘plus ca change, plus c’est le même chose’?

I have studied Gandhiji a lot. My father was a freedom fighter. I am going back to understanding Gandhiji’s seven deadly sins and his thoughts on knowledge without character, commerce without morality and science without humanity. All three are aligned to, to create greater self-awareness among all of us. Gandhiji cut to the chase really. Self-awareness is the key. We don’t give people the ability to ask and give feedback. Leaders too are faltering. Leaders get work done through others. And that makes an organisation great. Unlike a great doctor who tends to do stuff himself.

Schools also seem to have lost its where practical skills is concerned.

We looked at our (teacher’s) jobs as filling people with knowledge and they will get the experience on the job. There are three big issues on ‘doing skills’ —

Understanding the gap between theory and practice and the limitations of the models that people are using

The ability to apply in practice what you have learnt in theory

The pedagogy of teaching practical/doing skills is flawed. We poo-pooed experiential learning earlier. Second, we need innovations in pedagogies

What has been the key value proposition of B-schools so far; what will their value proposition be going forward?

I would like the mission to be — ‘People who come here are going to be entrepreneurs, managers and leaders rather than analysts and functionaries’. By doing this, a lot of unmet needs will get met more often along with doing skills and greater self-awareness.

Chandu Nair, an IIMA alumnus, is a Chennai-based entrepreneur.
UPSC to reform Civil Services (main) exam

COMMITTEE CONSTITUTED Wants to select candidates with in-depth knowledge and understanding

HT Correspondent
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NEW DELHI: The Civil Services (Main) Examination is next on the UPSCs reforms agenda. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has constituted a high-powered committee to suggest changes in the pattern of this examination.

The move comes after the Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination 2011 in its new format sought to test the aptitude of the candidates as well and not just their knowledge.

The changes in the preliminary exam weren’t as drastic as the UPSC had originally hoped. This is one reason why the government was reluctant to rename the preliminary test as the civil services aptitude test.

At the third UPSC foundation day function this week, UPSC chairman Prof. DP Agrawal said the changes had been well received as they provided the candidates a level playing field leading to improved quality of selection.

Agrawal — who has been pushing reforms at the commission — went on to announce that the UPSC was looking at changes that needed to be made in the Civil Services (Main) examination as well as other exams.

“Consistent with the need for selecting the right kind of person from a huge pool consisting of multiple languages, creeds, culture and communities, the commission has now constituted a high-power committee to suggest possible changes in the pattern of Civil Services (Main) Examination,” he said.

Agrawal also said that the commission’s endeavour was to ensure that “candidates are judged on the basis of in-depth knowledge and understanding rather than information gathered at the last moment.”

In six decades, UPSC has selected nearly quarter of a million candidates after examining over 46 million applicants.

This is equivalent to the population of South Africa or England.

Minister of State for Personnel and PMO V. Narayanaswamy agreed that the recruitment policies of the commission needed to be reviewed and revised to make recruitment faster and also to ensure induction of the civil servants with the right aptitude.

Agrawal agreed, pointing that the commission was looking at other examinations to bring them in tune with the present scenario of country’s development and aspirations.

Similarly, he said, the commission had recommended an alternative system to the government to improve the process of induction of civil service officers from different streams into the All India Service.
Field of dreams
Harvard Business School reinvents its MBA course

Young mums shopping in the Copley Mall in downtown Boston last month found themselves being questioned about their use of soap by students from Harvard Business School. The students were not doing odd jobs to earn beer money. They were preparing to help a firm in Brazil launch an antibacterial cleanser.

Fieldwork—ie, going out and talking to people—is a big change for HBS. Its students used to sit in a classroom and discuss case studies written by professors. Now they may also work in a developing country and launch a start-up. “Learning by doing” will become the norm, if a radical overhaul of the MBA curriculum succeeds.

The 900 students arriving in Boston this summer for their two-year course were told they would be guinea pigs. The new practical addition to HBS’s curriculum is known as “FIELD” (Field Immersion Experiences for Leadership Development). Not all the staff and students are overjoyed to be experimented on. But the man responsible, Nitin Nohria, who became dean of HBS in July 2010, says that “if it works, the FIELD method could become an equal partner to the case method.”

Long before he became dean, Mr Nohria lamented the failure of business schools to fulfill their mission of turning management into a profession similar to law or medicine. Asked what should be expected from someone with an MBA, he replies that “obviously, they should master a body of knowledge. But we should also expect them to apply that knowledge with some measure of judgment.” MBA students have long been sent on summer internships with prospective employers, but HBS, like most business schools, did little else to help them with the practical application of management studies.

What happens in the second year of the new course is still being worked out. But the first year has three elements. First, team-building exercises. Students take turns to lead a group engaged in a project such as designing an “eco-friendly sculpture”. They learn to collaborate and to give and take feedback. These exercises are loosely based on ones used in the US army.

Second, students will be sent to work for a week with one of more than 140 firms in 11 countries. Already the new intake have had conference calls with these companies, ranging from the Brazilian soapmaker to a Chinese property firm, and gone off campus to conduct product-development “dashies” like the one in Copley Mall.

Mr Nohria says he hopes some real businesses will be created. (If only HBS had thought of this when Bill Gates was thinking of starting Microsoft, or Mark Zuckerberg was creating Facebook—perhaps the school would have received shares in those firms.)

It is unclear how much the one-week working assignments will achieve. Pankaj Ghemawat, a management guru, says “the literature suggests that an immersion experience needs to be at least 2-3 weeks and be backed up with time in the classroom.”

The HBS students’ classroom preparation will have to be pretty thorough, then, to make up for the brevity of their field trips. Moreover, some of the HBS alumni who have agreed to offer work experience at their firms say they are unsure what meaningful work they can offer the students.

Privately, some faculty members are sceptical that all this change will be worthwhile. In January, the vote in favour of trying the field method was “as enthusiastic as you could get from a faculty,” says Mr Nohria, wryly. He wisely ensured that ownership of the idea was widely spread by delegating design of the new curriculum to several faculty committees. The vote gave the go-ahead to run a “delicate experiment for 3-5 years to see if we can move the needle”, he says, compared with the 13 years it took to develop the case method into more or less what it is today.

The experiment does not come cheap, adding 10-15% to the course’s cost (students pay at least $8,400 a year), which HBS will bear while it figures out what works. A lot is at stake. For whereas Harvard leads, other universities may follow.
Super 30 founder is one of world's 20 top teachers

Anand Kumar

Patna: Math wizard Anand Kumar, who has won accolades for his initiative to train poor students for IIT-JEE, has figured in an international list of 20 pioneering teachers of the world.

Mr. Kumar and his Super 30 initiative is the only entry from India in the select list published by Monocle, a magazine published from England, according to Super 30 sources.

Mr. Kumar has found a mention in the category "Class Act — Globe Top 20 Teachers" for the way he has groomed students from the poorest sections of the society consistently over the last 10 years. Apart from him, others to find place in the list are Neil Turok, Pierre Keller, Munir Fasheh, Sarah Elizabeth Ippel and others.

According to Monocle, Mr. Kumar is as popular as any actor due to his revolutionary teaching and commitment to the cause. — PTI
Cloned mammoths to be reality in 5 years?

London: Scientists have claimed that within five years the extinct woolly mammoth could be brought back to life from the bone marrow of the species.

A team from Russia’s Sakha Republic’s mammoth museum and Kinki University in Japan says that the recent discovery of well-preserved marrow inside the thigh bone of a woolly mammoth in Siberia has raised its hope that the species could be cloned.

The scientists are now gearing up to launch a full-fledged joint research next year aiming to recreate the giant mammal, the Daily Mail reported.

By replacing the nuclei of egg cells from an elephant with those taken from the mammoth’s marrow cells, embryos with mammoth DNA can be produced, say scientists.

They will then plant the embryos into elephant wombs for delivery as the two species are close relatives. Securing nuclei with an undamaged gene is essential for the nucleus transplantation technique. Mammoths became extinct about 10,000 years ago. But the discovery has increased the chances of a successful cloning.