Making the choice that matters

ROAD TO SUCCESS Choosing the right course and the right educational institution are big decisions. It is important to get them right as they can have a huge impact on one's future. **V Pradeep Kumar** provides a checklist

A majority of engineering students are keen to gain admission in top B schools in the country as this will help them get their dream job in some of the best corporate houses across the world. There is nothing wrong in engineering graduates applying for an MBA. In fact, engineering and MBA is an excellent combination. The concern is, management graduates with an engineering background taking up non-technical jobs. Such trends can lead to job dissatisfaction and organisational issues.

When such candidates are asked as to why they took up an engineering degree in the first place, a large number of them cite 'parental pressure' as the main reason. This disturbing trend is continuing and hence, students need to understand the process of 'choosing the right course'.

Aptitude test reveals options

As students, everybody will have a certain dream career. Passion can trigger excellence in career. Therefore, while choosing the course, the first step is to undergo an aptitude test. These days, career options are plenty and an aptitude test can reveal the potential for Medical, Engineering, Accountancy or Management courses or non-conventional courses such as Acting, Journalism, Hospitality, and so on.

Research career prospects

The second step is to evaluate the job market for the chosen course. Depending on course duration, you must research and understand the future job market. If you are planning to become an entrepreneur, then the research should evaluate the market for the chosen field. In other words, apart from aptitude and passion, career prospect is an equally important factor to evaluate.

Evaluating a university

The third step is to evaluate all universities and institutes, which offer the chosen course. The important parameters to evaluate are:

Reputation: Check the reputation of the university. In particular, consider the number of years, membership of professional bodies, affiliations and so on.

Resources: Check the library for the range of books and journals; hostel facilities, logistics and so on.

Faculty: A good teacher can make a huge difference in adding value to your knowledge. Other factors like faculty-student ratio, qualification and experience, industry background and research publications point out to the quality of teaching.

Placement: Check the placement record, kind of companies that visit the college for placement, starting positions and packages.

Course: Examine the course content to ensure that it meets your requirement. Teaching methodology can vary, especially if you are also evaluating universities abroad.

Cost: Carefully understand the fees and other costs such as hostel, books, travel, etc. If you intend to take a study loan, understand the documentation requirements of bankers.

There are professional agencies, publications and educational authorities who publish the ratings of universities, which is a useful reference.

While choosing the right course,

■ Follow your dream, but be sure you'll love the job.

■ Evaluate your well-wishers' recommendations with an open mind. Don't choose out of pressure.

■ Consult a mentor — someone with experience and maturity, who can think from your perspective. If required, avail services of career counsellors.

■ Evaluate all options carefully. Select and prioritise a few accredited universities.

■ If you are choosing some specialised courses, select a university close to the industry, as it helps in interactions while doing the course, and also in placements.

■ Establish a link with people who have completed the same course to understand an insider perspective.

■ Schedule your loan repayments considering employment period and the cost of living.

■ Be clear about the admission process, deadlines and entry requirements, if the chosen course is abroad.

■ Research and update on campus life, especially if the place is unfamiliar or abroad.

Depending on the course chosen, augment your knowledge by regular reading of journals, magazines and membership of professional bodies.

At the end of the evaluation, be clear about all aspects of the course and your future career.

It's a good idea to ask yourself relevant questions and confirm whether you have the answers. If in doubt, consult industry professionals.

Education is not something you receive, but it is something you achieve. As Greek philosopher Aristotle said, "The roots of education may be bitter, but the fruits are sweet."

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