

# Make studying abroad rewarding

**CHOOSE PRUDENTLY** Students who want to go abroad for higher studies must identify the primary motivation behind such a decision. Today, 'studied abroad' does not have much value per se; the important question is where you have studied. The reputation and appropriateness of the university to the course is more significant, says V Pradeep Kumar

A foreign degree was always close to the Indian mindset, perhaps influenced by colonialism. Globalisation has turned India into a knowledge economy bringing in a new mindset of rational thinking. Today, we have excellent institutions in engineering, medicine, management etc. as confirmed by the latest world rankings. Simultaneously, many foreign universities have set up base in India. Currently, students are not blindly jumping into the foreign bandwagon. They are going abroad to study only after a detailed analysis and as an outcome of a career plan.

## Why go abroad?

Students going abroad for higher studies must identify the primary motivation behind such a decision. A few common factors are:

- Specific course/specialisation requirement
- Difficulty in getting into top Indian institutes
- Reputation and brand value
- A career abroad
- Personal reasons

Irrespective of the motive, choose prudently and get the benefit of a global perspective, which can kick-start your career.

## Reputation is important

Today, 'studied abroad' doesn't have much value per se; the important question is where you studied. The reputation and appropriateness of the university to the course is more significant. Popular study destinations are USA, Canada, UK, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

In a few countries, institutions with inadequate facilities have mushroomed trying to attract students from everywhere. Further, in countries affected by recession, federal deficits have meant cut in grants and many universities have resorted to dubious methods to attract students, violating local laws in the process. A large number of students have been victims, lured into such universities by fraudulent Indian agents. Therefore, exercise caution while choosing the university.

## Plan meticulously

Whether or not to study abroad is a vital decision as it determines your career and personal life. Understanding your strengths, interests and passion, is vital. Analyse opportunities that fuel your passion and aspirations and make a comprehensive career plan.

Once you decide to study abroad, plan meticulously. Decide the mode of financing and repayment terms. The following is a guideline to the process, which may take up to two years:

- **Entrance exams:** Find out what specific exams you need to take such as GMAT for Management studies, MCAT for Medicine, LSAT for Law, GRE for graduate courses. Check the entrance exam specific to your course/country and prepare well.
- **English proficiency exams:** You also need to take exams like IELTS/TOEFL that test your English proficiency. These standardised exams are fair to applicants from all countries and test the ability to write, read, listen and speak in English.
- **Identify universities:** Make a list of reputed and appropriate universities for your course. It's desirable to



## Checklist

- Get an internationally valid credit card. Mix your cash in currency and traveller's cheques.
- Get an international driving license. In many countries, it has utility until you get a valid permanent license.
- Get vaccinations, as required. Consult your physician and take common drugs for immediate use, with prescriptions. Importantly, check if carrying those drugs is legal.
- Get travel and medical insurance, for the required period.
- Sign affidavits and power of attorney, if you anticipate legal matters.
- Get International student identity card. For a small fee, you get a host of bene-

- fits.
- Get membership of Hostelling International. This is ideal, to travel around in the country for educational or personal reasons.
- Take travel adapter, mobile phone that meets local specs and small mementos for people from whom you may seek help.
- Scan documents such as passport, visa page, admission papers, addresses, contact numbers of your destination, and email it to yourself. Carry documents safely and copy to a laptop/USB.
- After reaching your destination, register yourself with the Indian student's association and Indian embassy.



shortlist 10-15 universities as admission processes are long and subject to uncertainties.

- **Application forms:** The admission process is generally similar, but application forms may be different.

Support your application with résumé, mark sheets, thesis/articles/essays as specified, recommendation letters, payment receipts, financial aid forms, etc.

- **Admission process:** Send the scores of

TOEFL/IELTS/GRE/GMAT/MCAT/LSAT etc., to the universities applied. The admission process for top universities may include an interview. Be prepared to answer common questions like reasons for choosing

specific course/university etc.

- **Admission offers:** Subject to the merit of your candidature, you will get admission offers from universities. While waiting for admission, it's important to

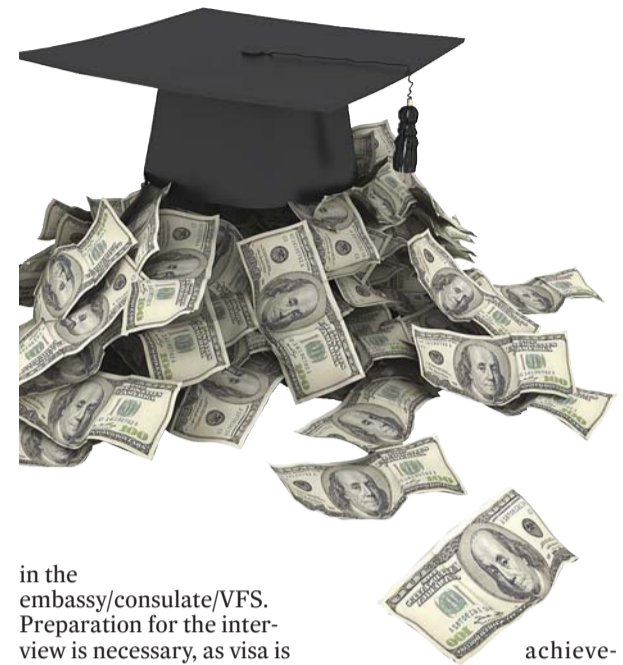
sustain focus on your current education.

- **Final evaluation:** If you apply for 10-15 universities, you may get admission in a few. If you are unsuccessful in the preferred university, don't panic. Evaluate other offers, considering location, size, facilities, faculty-student ratio, student mix, course content, learning methods etc. Advanced tools are also available on some websites facilitating a systematic comparison and selection of shortlisted universities. In addition, talk to seniors, counselors/mentors and if possible, take an industry opinion. If cost and visa issues permit, make a campus visit; if not, make a virtual tour.

- **Acceptance letter:** Communicate your final acceptance to the chosen university. If you have multiple offers, inform your inability to join other universities, enabling release of seats to waitlisted students.

- **Visa papers:** After receiving your acceptance, the university will process your admission and send the relevant documents (I 20 for USA) for applying for a student visa.

- **Visa process:** Submit documents and apply for a non-immigrant student visa



in the embassy/consulate/VFS. Preparation for the interview is necessary, as visa is not automatic. Common factors for considering a visa include admission in a recognised university, the ability to finance all expenses and strong ties in India.

- **Accommodation:** As you await your visa interview, start other preparations like finding an accommodation within the campus or outside. Many students share a group accommodation, which is economical and convenient. Identify students compatible and plan together.

- **Others:** Understand local custom and culture. If you are going to countries like France, Germany etc. learning the local language is helpful. Establish contact with local Indian students' association and get to know campus life.

Getting admission into a reputed university abroad is an

achievement and can be exciting. Carry this achievement forward with a sense of determination, focus and adaptability. There are two kinds of education: one that gets you degrees to make a living and the other, knowing how to live. Dealing with unexpected situations in a new environment can be challenging and is an education in itself. Studying abroad increases your knowledge and broadens your horizon.

A foreign degree by itself isn't a success formula; you must have a larger ambition. As Catherine Pulsifer, American author said, "Our ability to achieve success depends on the strength of our wings gained through knowledge and experience. The greater our knowledge and experience, the higher we can fly".

(The author is a management and career consultant.)

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