

Planning to choose the right career, institution

CORRECT CHOICE

Choosing a career and an institute should be subject of a healthy debate between you and your parents or guardians, writes V Pradeep Kumar



A new academic year begins soon, have you planned your higher education? Have you finalized the course in line with your passion? Importantly, do you know how to evaluate and select institutions?

A few weeks back, an extremely tense graduate student walked in for counselling, along with her mother. Her problem was how to choose an institute for her MBA program? Her other issue was to assess a particular institute in the city, where many of her friends had decided to join.

Education is now a flourishing business and with multiplicity of institutes, deciding an institute is not an easy task for students aspiring for higher education. Further, there are institutes involved in controversies by making false claims related to foreign tie-ups and recognitions. Consequently, many institutes are closing down every year, while new are mushrooming. Compounding the problems, there's a lack of counselling and mentoring process in many graduate institutions, leaving the students the onerous task of selecting an institute, for their higher education.

How to choose the right institute?

Look at the number of institutions in India. We have 42 central universities, 275 state universities, 130 deemed universities, 90 private universities, 5 institutions established and functioning under the State Act, and 33 Institutes of National Importance. On an average, every university has around 300 affiliated colleges. In addition, there are over 26000 institutes offering professional education, leaving aside over 2000 polytechnics.

As a student pursuing higher education, evaluate the institutes on the following parameters:

1. The reputation: Doing your MBA (or any other course) with an institute of repute, gives the opportunity to highlight your credentials, right at the beginning in an interview. Consider the number of years of establishment and the institute's achievements. Evaluate the differences between an established and a relatively new institute in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. Specifically, assess the risks of joining a new institution, for professional/higher education.

2. Resources: The institute should have strong infrastructure, a healthy and congenial learning environment facilitating holistic development of students. Features like tie-ups with other leading world institutes, Wi-Fi, well-equipped library with latest editions of books, leading journals and periodicals, auditorium, seminar halls, hostel, subsidized and hygienic canteen, playgrounds, etc. are necessary. However, it takes time to build infrastructure and hence, evaluate the new institutes, carefully looking into profiles of the management team.

3. Faculty: India has a severe shortage of faculty in most disciplines and hence, you must check whether there's adequate number of qualified permanent faculty members. The visiting faculty must include those with industry experience and academic credentials, with a long-term association with the institute. Further, there must be a healthy balance between permanent and visiting faculty. In general, there's a great deal of instability in new institutes in quality and availability of faculty, which is an important factor to assess, from students' perspective.

4. Placement: To get into a rewarding career, critically evaluate the industry related to your passion and understand current and future prospects. Plan your career identifying the industry and companies, where you may like to begin. Analyze the placement data of institutes' to be reassured about the credentials, and it's alignment with your goals.

Therefore, identify institutes, with strong tie-ups with top companies and a 100% placement record. The prospect of getting into the right company eases your anxiety of building a career and helps to focus on learning.

5. Curriculum and pedagogy: Increase in number of institutes and deemed universities, has led to a significant difference in pedagogy and curriculum between them. For example, MBA program in one institute may have Industrial Marketing course whereas another may have Serv-

ices marketing or Rural Marketing. There's no standardization and the curriculum is designed to meet both local requirements as well as to project a unique selling proposition [USP]. Further, institutes may look very professional on paper, but could be extremely weak in executing their plans. The teaching methods in terms of emphasis on case studies, presentations, projects, summer internships vary too. Therefore, for a course that you are likely to pursue, research the curriculum and pedagogy from your perspective, understand the variations between institutes, their demonstrated execution capabilities, and decide accordingly.

6. Access to industry experts: In some professional courses like Management, Engineering, Medicine etc. there's need for close interaction with industry professionals/experts, to relate theoretical knowledge with practical aspects. Access to industry experts is limited in remote areas and this could be significant loss. For example, in a Pharmaceutical Engineering course, access to Pharmaceutical industry and Research Organizations, is crucial.

7. Approvals/Recognitions: With the mushrooming of institutions, approval of authorities such as UGC/AICTE/Technical Boards/Medical Council of India, Council of Architecture etc. is an important parameter to check. Some institutions lacking relevant approvals are luring students with freebies such as foreign trips, exchange programs with foreign institutions, laptops and misleading them. It's also necessary that industry and authorities in other countries must recognize degrees/diplomas awarded here. Students must be cautious and check approvals and recognitions, before deciding an institute.

8. Locational significance: Can you imagine doing an Engineering course in Mining in an area, where there are no mining industries or doing an MBA course, in a highly remote non-industrialized area? Choosing an institute also means evalu-

ating the appropriateness of the institute's location to the course and employment perspective. The infrastructure in remote and isolated areas is always an issue and you have to recognize the implications while selecting such an institute.

9. Costs: The costs vary between institutes related to course and tuition fees, additional courses, hostel, books, travel etc. Though organizing funds may not be an issue, with easy availability of educational loans, the more important aspect is to assess the worth of the benefits offered by institutes as compared to the costs.

10. Ranking: If researching data and analyzing the above factors by you sounds rather strenuous, consider other options. Several publishers, government and private organizations, get comparative data, analyze professionally, and publish a ranking list of institutions, for different courses. Referring to ranking lists enables you to evaluate comprehensively, empowering you to take a decision.

Lastly, you can also refer the alumni data of institutes and network with them, to understand their career progress as well as to check any specific points. Choosing a career and an institute, should be the subject of a healthy debate and discussion between you and your parents/guardians. Importantly, getting into a good institute by itself doesn't guarantee career progress, as it's more significant to finish the course, well. In a job interview assessment, your attitude, skills and knowledge [ASK] in relation to the job profile is the deciding factor, but a good institute can certainly facilitate interviews and contacts with top companies.

Indian spiritual leader and an eternal youth icon Swami Vivekananda said, "Stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, & know that you are the creator of your own destiny".

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