

Academic Year 2021: Is a short break advisable?

...V Pradeep Kumar

At the peak of last year's pandemic, I received a call from Shankar, father of Santosh, who had got a seat for a Computer Science engineering course. Considering the uncertainties, he wanted my advice if they can go ahead with the admission. Although the fees were to be paid immediately, there was no clarity about when the classes would begin.

I told Shankar, "In an engineering course, apart from regular classes, there would be lab assignments, mini projects, workshops and other course specific assignments. Many of these must be done on site as a team and online classes are a poor substitute. Therefore, it's better skip admission and take a break."

He wasn't expecting this advice. "In that case, Santosh would be wasting a year", he said anxiously. I said, "No. On the contrary he can use this break productively. Let Santosh join an online course like machine learning, designing algorithm, programming etc. Also, he can pursue a personality development course, which will help during placement. Further, let him consider an online part time job or pursue a hobby". Shankar was convinced.

Vijaya was extremely passionate about doing a MBBS course and failed to get a merit seat through NEET, last year. She comforted her parents-both doctors, took a break for a more meticulous preparation and is reappearing for the NEET exam this year. She's extremely confident of a merit seat.

Today, like Santosh or Vijaya, those who took a break and used it productively for a purpose are happy.

The situation is not different, this year. Board/competitive exams are postponed. Although, the pandemic is expected to ease, there's a devastating impact to deal with. Families have lost lives and jobs, and are in emotional and financial duress. There's still no clarity about the beginning of new academic year.

Yet, 'When one door closes another door, opens' is an adage worth remembering. Students, who are in the midst of preparation for graduate or

post-graduate courses in the forthcoming academic year, must consider the following benefits, with a break:

1. A subject related short-term online course, will validate your assumptions and if you indeed have a passion for the subject.
2. If you don't like the subject, nothing is lost, as you can make a new career plan.
3. Opportunity to reappear for competitive exams like NEET.
4. Opportunity to build your job-related soft skills.
5. Part-time jobs build your personality, apart from the excitement of your first earnings.

Taking decision amidst uncertainties

There can't be a general conclusion and one has to consider their individual situation and options. The following guideline may help:

1. What's your career plan?
 - a. It's imperative that you have a career plan and accordingly the choice of courses and institutes. Do consider the impact of the pandemic on your career. Many sectors have suddenly seen a surge in demand and many new sectors will open up, in the years to come. However, like Vijaya, don't give up your passion.
2. What's your family situation?
 - a. It's quite unfortunate that many families have lost lives and jobs. It's possible that the pandemic could have impacted the financial status of families, requiring time to recoup emotionally as well as financially.
3. Where do you live and what's the expected situation?
 - a. The severity of the pandemic has to be considered in relation to the healthcare infrastructure in the place of your living. Experts have been cautioning about a third wave too and well-being of everyone in the family is important.
4. What are the risks of an admission and how to mitigate?
 - a. Never in the past, one had to assess risks of admission to a course as this year. Sadly, it's true; therefore, consider the risks and arrive at a family decision, which is fair and balanced.
5. What's your assessment of next year?

- a. Hoping academic year 2022 is normal, process could be free from uncertainties and with a marginal increase in the competitive thrust in admissions. Do, assess this from your individual perspective.

Life is a long journey and a short break of a year would hardly make a difference. In fact, if you take the break and use it productively, it can make a positive impact on your life.

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