

Why Study Abroad?

- Aditya Kundalkar with inputs from Shirisha Kondury

There are few decisions that you will take in your life that have the potential to change your life. One such decision that can be very rewarding and advantageous is studying abroad. Probably the most important lesson that you will learn by studying overseas is adapting to change. Living and getting involved with another culture, in another country, even for a

couple of years, will teach you how to face different environments in a positive manner. It will also help you build a noticeable sense of independence and self-confidence. With the world becoming more and more of a "global village" day by day, employers, schools and universities, both in India and overseas are constantly on the lookout for people with these qualities.

Studying abroad can open doors to new opportunities, new friends, and new career paths. Remember to take this opportunity to explore the world, learn and experience a new culture. For most people, a chance like this won't come until after retirement, when you've hopefully saved up for a well-deserved vacation! As Ellie Katz has said, "The world is your playground. Why aren't you playing?"

♦ Academic Flexibility

When some students are asked why they opted to study abroad, the common refrain is that there is not enough flexibility in the educational system here. Students typically complain that they are not given opportunities to specialize at an earlier date and are made to learn a lot of things that are "irrelevant." While this is partly true, it's wrong to say that the curriculum in India is irrelevant – Indian degrees are more broad-based and thus serve to lay a stronger foundation for any future studies you may take up.

In fact, it is often observed that not many students can take clear decisions as to what they should specialize in at the bachelor's level itself. This can also prove disadvantageous as it limits your focus, right from your undergraduate level. For example, in case you decide against pursuing studies in that field, it becomes difficult to switch.

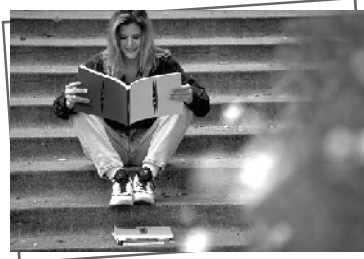
In India, at the master's level, it is observed that there are limited options for choosing a subject to major in, which is not the case in most foreign schools. Even the projects that are taken up do not involve in-depth research, simply because the facilities here are often inadequate. As a result, there isn't sufficient value-addition that takes place – for example, often B.Tech and M.Tech; or B.Com and M.Com students land up at the same job-level.

Conversely, in schools abroad, students are offered a wide choice of subjects in which to major. Every majoring student gets a job that fits his qualification well.

♦ Career Options

Education is typically a means to an end, and for most of us, this end is our career! Armed with a bachelor's degree from a foreign university, you certainly have better career prospects, wider opportunities at your disposal, whether you choose to settle abroad or even return to India. Needless to say, this would depend on the current situation in your area of expertise, but it is safe to say that for most careers, a foreign education puts you in a better position in terms of career prospects. Students with international experience get more attention from potential employers. That's because they know you'll be better equipped to work in the global marketplace.

As for jobs abroad, at the interview stage, your skill sets and overall profile would be assessed and not just your knowledge of the subject. Most recruiters wish to know how you work, not just what you know about your work. Preparation for events such as these is provided at the school you study in as well. Career Guidance Cells are a common feature of reputed foreign universities and career workshops are the order of the day. These



workshops would help you in building your résumé, facing interviews; involve counseling sessions, training for internships [in this case, choosing a university which is in close proximity to local industries is a good idea].

Back home, participation of colleges in career planning is low. Even the involvement of teachers in your future decisions is minimal. An interesting phenomenon concerning engineering students is that B.E. students often end up taking lectures in colleges, for want of suitable jobs. Similarly, Masters in disciplines of engineering, arts and commerce also take up posts in colleges as assistant professors, while PhD students become full-time professors.

♦ Financing your education

For all the advantages and value-additions that a foreign degree offers you, funds are a problem. Bachelor's programs abroad are not typically costly. You can often take up employment simultaneously to help you pay your way. However, while a Bachelor's degree from the USA provides you some job assurance, this is not the case in the UK or Australia; you would have to come back to India. So if you're expecting returns on your investment on an education abroad, a bachelor's degree may not be a wise choice – you'd be better off earning a bachelor's degree here in India and pursuing a master's abroad.

A master's degree is rather expensive, especially in comparison to a bachelor's degree. So taking up a part-time job often becomes a necessity. However, if you've taken up an MBA, it would be impossible for you to work simultaneously as the course itself will take up all your time! In this case, taking loans is most feasible.

♦ Faculty profiles

There is an interesting fact about faculty in schools abroad. The faculty in US schools and universities is ranked number one around the world. Not far behind are those in the UK and Australia. The interesting part is that most of these faculty members are from India. The kind of resources that are offered to faculty, the kind of respect that they command, and of course, the salaries, make these choice destinations for teachers. It is rather ironic when you think about it: Indian students going abroad to learn from Indian professors! ■

So think about it. Weigh the pros and cons, consider all your options and make a well-informed decision. It's hard to imagine any business, industry or career that doesn't have an international scope. A foreign education would virtually place the world at your feet!