

Life on campus before and after COVID-19

Getting up, going for jogging or playing some sport, then getting ready and having breakfast with friends often overcrowding at tables or at food counters, then going to the lab in buses, sometimes even standing because there were no seats available, going to the city on weekends, having food from dhabas, long rides, this was how most of our lives on campus were about 10 months ago. After this, the global pandemic struck and changed these a lot. It is global not only in the sense of its distribution but also at the individual level where it is globally or comprehensively affecting all aspects of our lives irrespective of whether we have the disease or not.

Institutions and management across nations are now trying to get the normal life back on the track alongside increasing productivity and making lives of their employees/ students/ workers more comfortable at the same time co-existing with the restrictions. IITH was closed for about four months before it was ready to receive the first batch of students and quarantine them for the mandated 14 days. These months at home on one hand felt good as we were getting to spend such a long time with our families after a very long time. But on the other hand, we were missing our friends in campus, we were missing our friends in the lab, the fun which we had while going to the city on weekends, the games and sports we played regularly, the late-night snacks in the cafeteria, the midnight birthday celebrations, we missed the sense of self-dependence we felt while on campus. We missed the sense of togetherness we feel while we are among our friends. With more batches of students joining in and finishing their quarantine, we are getting most

of these things back but with a new normal.

In the new normal, we are trying to get used to and accept the COVID-19 precautions. In mess, we have to sit distantly from each other, group activities like sports, cultural, celebrations etc. are not allowed, we have to put the mask on at all public places and restrict contact with people who are not a part of the biobubble we have created inside the campus. All this is good to prevent COVID-19 infection, but this increases the risk of developing mental health issues due to the academic pressures coupled with not having a stress releasing mechanism in the form of sports or interaction with friends or outing. Especially for students who are attending online semester, it is even more difficult to submit the assignments, take tests at the same time attending to the family duties and household chores. At home, there are several factors which are not under our control which affect our focus on studies. It can vary from household responsibilities to family expectations of meeting relatives or friends to whom we can't say no often. Such factors, to a large extent, do not affect our lives when we are on campus but are more pronounced when we are at home.

Personally, I feel that in the current situation I can be more focused and productive in my research work because now the thought of playing a sport or going out with friends is simply non-existent. It has also increased the time I spend in the lab although I do miss playing cricket at times. The extra time at my perusal due to the new norm allows me to do some extra study of research papers as well.

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Because we constantly try to diversify our activities and in the process pick up new hobbies. With limited options now available to me, I think I am participating and concentrating more on each activity that I am doing and can find joy in them be it research or reading or jogging or even some discussion with my friends. This pandemic is teaching me to be in the present, make the best of the moment and be hopeful.

As students, we are all doing our best in trying to adapt to the new norms and we understand the need to do so too. But sometimes we do feel that in some aspects, restrictions are imposed as a blanket ban. As a doctoral representative, I along with my fellow doctoral representative are constantly trying to adapt and pertain to changing students' needs in these exceptional times. The amenities which

were easily available to all before COVID-19 situation are restricted now and to that end, we need rationalization of rules towards which we are constantly trying. At the same time, we are endeavoring to strike a balance between the students' comfort and making students aware of the need for a particular rule for everyone's safety. Also, in trying to co-exist with the new norms, we are also focused towards the aim for which we are all here i.e. building our careers and we wish to organize seminars and events to that end as well.

I hope and I pray that for all of us this experience brings an understanding that things may not always turn out the way we want, but if we can constantly adapt to the changing situations, we are increasing our chances to come out stronger, wiser and happier at the end of it.

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