

Women Students at Centre of IITs' Balancing Act

5 premier institutes
mull fee waiver for
girl students to boost
gender diversity

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New Delhi: At least five Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are considering a fee waiver for women students to improve the gender diversity ratio at the country's premier engineering schools.

IIT Mandi took the lead earlier this week by approving a fee waiver along with a monthly scholarship of ₹1,000 for all women students starting this semester. This will cover existing students as well, provided they pass the semester.

"Almost all our existing 30 women students in the B. Tech programme qualify for the fee waiver and scholarship this year, starting from this semester," said IIT Mandi director Timothy A Gonsalves. Of 500 B. Tech students at Mandi, 30 are female.

In 2016, of more than 10,500 seats at all IITs, only 830 were filled by women, despite 2,200 qualifying. According to an internal study conducted by IIT Del-

hi, women fare better given an equal opportunity within the campus —they consistently outperformed males by about 1 grade point on average, despite lower JEE/JEE (Advanced) ranks in the 13 years to 2015.

"It is the Indian mindset to invest heavily on sons' education. Women do not get a level playing field when it comes to coaching and even funding for engineering at IITs," said Ravinder Kaur, an IIT Delhi faculty member who was part of the study.

The fee for general category undergraduate students is typically about ₹1 lakh per semester or ₹8-10 lakh for the entire programme. Of the students who qualified through the JEE Advanced this year, 14% are women. As in past years, not all will join, the IITs expect.

The schools in Delhi, Varanasi, Mumbai and Ropar are also in favour of fee exemptions for women students. "We will be looking at waiving the fee for female candidates from next year," IIT Ropar director Sarit K Das told ET. Das added that improving diversity is an urgent task.

IIT Kharagpur professor Sudeshna Sarkar, who monitors diversity initiatives at the school, also agreed that "some kind of waiver" for women students would boost numbers.

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