

Ahead of the Curve: Pvt Universities Put in Place International Tie-Ups

Varuni.Khosla@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: At a time when the unemployability of engineers is a matter of concern, some new-age universities are giving their students an edge with their international tie-ups with top universities like Yale, Georgia Tech, University of Oxford, among others.

Universities like Bennett, BML Munjal, OP Jindal and Flame have tied up with the top foreign universities of the world to give students that much more of an advantage in the job market.

Bennett's tie-up with Babson Global and Georgia Tech makes their academic learning more rigorous with a tailored, curated syllabus.

At OP Jindal, the over 100 students who visit international campuses through their tie-ups every year, end up gaining a global perspective. BML Munjal has a tie-up with Imperial College, London.

According to an ET report, nearly 1.5 million Indians graduate from engineering colleges every year, and nearly four-fifths of them are unemployable.

Several private universities have been offering the facility since the last two years, said Adarsh Khandelwal, director of Collegify, which helps aspiring students identify the top academic institutions.

"Universities like these and SP Jain and Ashoka offer students the ability to be able to spend time in an (overseas) environment, without studying there full time. It also means faculty from there come here and teach them. This exposure in the classroom environment helps students get a broader mindset," he said.

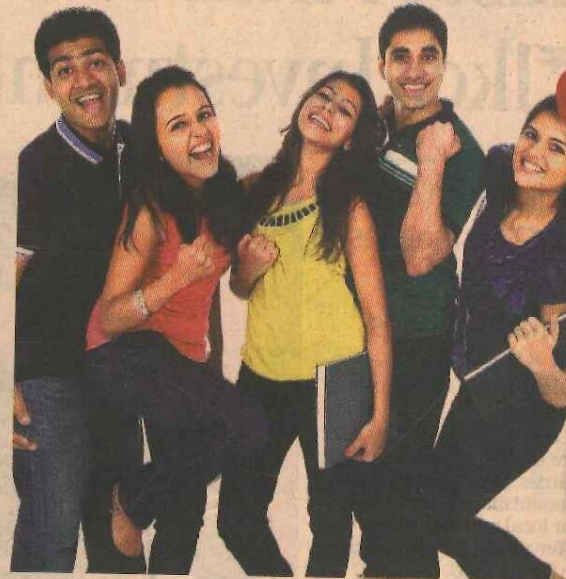
While it is a great networking tool, in some cases, one semester goes by too quickly and doesn't give students enough experience, he said.

SPECIALISED COURSES

Bennett is a founding member of the Babson Collaborative, an initiative that encourages entrepreneurial thinking in action—one of the academic differentiators. The university has an academic partnership with Georgia Tech for the School of Engineering focusing on making academic learning more rigorous and development of specialised courses customised to the Indian context.

What differentiates these courses is the pedagogy, that is how these are delivered. "The attention span of today's student is 8-12 minutes now. To engage and stimulate a student's mind for a 50-minute class requires pedagogical skills and interactive assignments which are provided by our academic partner institutes," said Dr Yaj Medury, vice chancellor, Bennett University.

Bennett's academic partner for law, Cornell Law School, will be deputing a faculty member later in the year, who will deliver a course combining law and literature, specifically dealing with a collection of novels, films and some poetry that addresses debates about law and/or human rights in South Asia, designed to illu-



mine the legal issues they contend with.

Bennett is intrinsically changing the standard education pedagogy, making it more interactive, discussing perspectives. "Besides students working in hi-tech laboratory facilities at our academic partner campus during a summer immersion visit, we urge them to forge a network with international faculty from there," he said.

"In the older institutions like the IITs, it becomes very difficult for faculty to change the dynamics of how courses are taught. We are doing things in a qualitative manner and that makes it worthwhile for the student," he added.

Dr Vijay Madisetti, Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Georgia Tech, said, "Foreign tie-ups allow students to leverage the research, educational and industry connections of the partner foreign universities to understand the needs of the global marketplace in terms of skills and competencies needed, and also to engage in learning these skills earlier in their educational programme setting them up for a better choice of internships."

He said that exchange visits can also provide further educational benefits through hands-on training at the foreign site.

GLOBAL CLASSROOMS

Sonepat-based OP Jindal University has a tie-up with Brooklyn Law School in the US, Bond University, Australia, Singapore Management University and 14 others.

"In some cases, students go there for the summer or one semester. It gives them exposure and apart from learning, they also understand the teaching curriculum and are able to meet and network with people from different countries," said Dr Mimi Roy, associate pro-

Smart Move

SCHOOLS HELP STUDENTS GAIN AN INTERNATIONAL OUTLOOK

Some universities forge tie-ups allowing students to get an opportunity to spend a semester abroad

Universities also bring faculty from abroad to assist in making courses more relevant to the Indian context

Students get a head start and are also able to write better statements of purpose if they are applying to courses abroad

Global tie-ups also help universities train their own faculty to get more international exposure

said that its MBA was designed after mapping industry demands and practices. Since these demands are dynamic, international tie-ups help improve the scope of the programme.

"In engineering, the critical question right now is, how do you make it an employable degree and that is the issue that we are addressing. We have a lot of industry partners so that straight from engineering schools, you get a relevant job," he said.

Every year the university reviews the curriculum. For the university, partner schools act as great sounding boards and providers of learning tools. "Partner schools tell us what works for them and they bring depth to our courses," he added.

While they cover 50% of the cost, students tend to hesitate to pay the fee at partner schools. Often, the school brings faculty members from there to India.

"We have at least two faculty members per semester here and, twice a year, we do a workshop for a faculty. Our MBA has about approximately 20 students going abroad last year and in the next one year up to 50 can go. We see a huge change in them, they are lot more confident and are exposed and they think global and not just India," said Munjal.

DEVELOPING RESEARCH SKILLS

Flame University has international associations with many institutes like Nuffield College in Oxford, Wellesley College, Yale University, Babson College and Kelley School of Business at Indiana University Bloomington amongst others. Representatives of these institutes have visited the campus and students have already had the opportunity to study abroad at some of the partner institutions. Its critical tie-ups include one with Yale University, which allows students to study at the American Ivy

League research university's Summer Session Program. With Babson College, students can learn best practices in entrepreneurship education.

"Some collaborations allow students to study a semester abroad and experience university life in the host country, some allow them to attend summer school, some allow them to learn from foreign faculty that come to India to teach them, some allow them to develop their research skills. Additionally, they also benefit from joint curriculum development activities," said Dr Devi Singh, vice chancellor, Flame University.

He added that studying in a new educational setting helps students hone their skills and develop new ones. "We definitely believe that with global immersion, our students get a head start," he said.

Bennett's tie-up with Babson Global and Georgia Tech makes their academic learning more rigorous with a tailored, curated syllabus

fessor and assistant dean, international collaborations, Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities.

The university also lays emphasis on whether something can be done with these partnerships for the future career prospects of students. In some cases, it helps with higher education applications to write a better statement of purpose (SOP) for future applications.

They also have a concept of global classrooms where, during the semester, the university's specific schools will have four-five lectures over video calls.

"We do workshops with universities we are collaborating with and we do learn a lot with this process," added Roy.

Additionally, the schools at Jindal University map courses first and those courses that aren't already taught there take priority. Universities like Cambridge, which it also ties up with, has a pedagogy that dates back many hundreds of years. That, clubbed with a new-age syllabus, gives a more global approach.

The university sends over 100 third-year students overseas as part of its summer programme.

IMPROVING EMPLOYABILITY

At BML Munjal University, the international academic alliance includes one with Imperial College in London, which is playing a mentoring role in the formation and operation of the School of Management and School of Commerce. It is also the academic mentor for the School of Engineering & Technology.

Akshay Munjal, president of the university,