

# Make or break: choose your UG degree well

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Four decades ago the prestigious private sector jobs were with Indian MNCs. All that was required to land a plum job was an undergraduate degree from a well-known institution such as St Stephen's College of Delhi University. So a bachelor's degree in the Arts was the passport to success.

Then came the MBA revolution of the 1980s and suddenly, an undergraduate degree was not enough. Now what was required was a postgraduate qualification from the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) to land the top corporate jobs in the country. Private institutions offering an MBA mushroomed across the country and even engineers from the IITs needed to do two more years in an IIM before they could aspire to the top jobs.

As a result, the undergraduate

degree became an intermediary step towards a postgraduate qualification (MBA) and was therefore immediately devalued. So students would enroll in any undergraduate institution, sail through the three or four years of graduation with minimal attention to academics, at the same time joining coaching classes which would groom them for the Common Admission Test (CAT) of prestigious postgraduate institutions such as the IIMs. The undergraduate degree completely lost its relevance in India.

But the wheel has now turned a full circle. With the unchecked expansion of private institutions offering an MBA, there was a glut in the market – an oversupply of candidates with a dubious postgraduate qualification in Management. Companies realised that the golden IIT-IIM combination did not necessarily meet the requirements of the new jobs being created globally in the ser-

vice economy, and in the creative fields. Tech companies started scouting for talent at the undergraduate level and suddenly campus recruitment at engineering institutions jumped. Interest in students with a good undergraduate degree in the arts and social sciences was re-kindled. Today, in many countries around the world, a good undergraduate degree – such as the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) – is sufficient to land yourself a corporate assignment.

Unfortunately, the number of institutions offering a good undergraduate degree in India are virtually non-existent.

Our undergraduate education system is exclusively a state domain and we all know what happens when the government is in charge. The quality of faculty, the pedagogy, the resources and infrastructure available to a state-funded college is so inadequate that doing an undergradu-

ate program is literally a waste of the student's time.

But all is not lost - the recent entry of a few private institutions in India offers hope to students. Not only do these institutions employ world-class faculty and an internationally recognised curriculum, they also provide global learning by rotating students across their campuses in different part of the world. A four-year BBA undergraduate programme at such institutions may involve a semester at Singapore, Dubai and Australia and offer opportunities to students for international internships and placements.

So my advice is to look around for a good undergraduate programme at an institution which provides global learning.

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