

Is a career about ‘what I do’ or ‘who I am’?

Link:- <http://careerlinksonline.in/careers-an-international-perspective/>

The true meaning of life lies in trying to make sense of this all pervasive question. Moreover, while most careers are seen as a means to an end, the most fulfilling careers are an end in themselves. They become you. If you’ve ever met a superbly passionate and dedicated doctor, teacher, photographer, financial analyst, golfer or even a dog trainer, you’ll know what I mean. Career decisions are life decisions.

Fortunately, today, more than ever before, students can choose to think beyond the fields of Medicine and Engineering; they can become explorers, deep-sea divers, designers, artists, nutritionists, media experts, sports managers – anything is possible. You will not be scorned if you said you wanted to explore transgender studies or metaphysics or oenology or if you wanted to combine the study of economics with philosophy or baking with science & technology or genetics with computer science. Now it may be difficult to see these combinations in our home turf, but universities and colleges overseas are teeming with interesting student options that celebrate our multifarious personalities.

Why study abroad?

In my opinion, studying overseas is an innovative way to explore the world. Allowing yourself to step out of your comfort zone and learn is a sure shot recipe for unique life experiences that can add value to your personality. Moreover, a variety of options and a holistic application-admission criterion against the backdrop of the rigid

Indian university framework, make education overseas an attractive proposition today.

How to apply overseas?

Most international application wallets are a compilation of your academic scores in school and college, competitive scores in the SAT or ACT, SAT Subject Tests for undergrads or the GMAT or GRE exams for post graduation. Scores like the BMAT (Biomedical Aptitude Test) and the UKCAT (UK Clinical Aptitude Test) are essential for Medicine aspirants. Indian students also need to appear for an English proficiency test TOEFL or IELTS and submit recommendation letters from teachers or employers.

However, the true differentiator in any application is the personal statement or the essay that colleges demand from students. This is where students have an opportunity to share who they really are.

Time and again, university representatives have shared how disappointing it is reading an application that is high on numbers but is creatively 'flat'. You can be a nerd, a drop-out, a wannabe pop-star, a space enthusiast, an editor, or a sports junkie... whoever you may be, it is important that your application reflects who you really are and not just what you have achieved. This is because top international universities are not merely concerned with the marks you score but are willing to look at the life you've lived and the experiences you have accumulated – and the only place where you get a chance to put yourself out there is in the college essays section. You might say: 'So what's the big deal? We can write essays. We've been writing essays since third grade'. Well, perhaps that is where the problem lies. We

are taught the intro-body-conclusion format and told how to write. We are corrected, imposed upon, spell-checked, grilled on grammar and we even learn to write 'model answers' to the most asked essay topics!

Then, in the journey of our lives, we chance upon an Ivy League application and a question that asks us: If you could put a message in a bottle, what would it say? Oops! Did I hear you say that this was not in the curriculum? Does it matter now, how well you can write? Or, how well can you think?

International applications and admissions are a test of your thinking skills. It's about changing the question from 'how good am I' to 'how good can I be'. It's about challenging yourself to change the benchmark from the peers in your neighbourhood to your co-learners and you across the world.

How much money should I set aside for overseas education?

Contrary to popular understanding, education abroad need not be expensive. While a number of universities offer liberal scholarships and financial aid to students based on need or merit, or both, there are colleges in the United States that are need-blind and will offer generous grants to students who are accepted. A recent case in point is my student from Jaipur, who was accepted for engineering at Drexel University, Pennsylvania, with a 100 per cent scholarship amounting to close to Rs 1.6 crores!

There are the Erasmus Mundus and Commonwealth scholarships that are popular in the European Union and have made studying in Europe cheaper than studying in India. Many students choose Singapore as an

affordable study option since they can apply for tuition grants with the Singaporean Ministry of Education. So, depending on your budget and your aspiration, there is a university and a scholarship that can be an ideal fit.

When should I start preparing?

Every step counts. Parents or counsellors and students must start working on a plan as early as in Class Nine. Planning in advance will give you a distinct advantage academically, financially and geographically. The plan must be a comprehensive outline that matches your dreams to your preparation – they are two sides of the same coin. Do your research and consult an unbiased counsellor to help you make sense of the plethora of options out there.

For young minds aiming at higher education, particularly in India, the need of the decade is equitable, fair-minded direction so that they can plan better and achieve nothing less than the best. Unfortunately, commercial messages and miscommunication with vested interests are rampant today and even in this information age, they tend to confuse the student more than clarify.

As a parent or a counsellor, when you help your child target a country, a university, a course, a scholarship in an organised manner you create a psychologically aspirational goal in the mind of the student. Often this orientation is enough to propel the student in the right direction and make them successful. However, I must warn you against making this as an obsessive-compulsive aspiration, for then it can become more of a constraint and limit. As David McCollough

said: “Climb a mountain not so the world can see you but so you can see the world”.

Careers define us. Get ready to write your own definition.