

"PGPX Gets Underway, IIMA Alumnus, June 2006"

Special Report

PGPX Gets Underway

The Institute's Post Graduate Programme in Management for Executives (PGPX) was formally launched on the day of the convocation by the Chairman in the presence of the 61 participants. The programme aims to develop bright, enthusiastic executives into management leaders and change agents in the global arena. The course focuses on a project-based approach and exposure to industry. It has been designed to provide participants with an opportunity of getting world-class management education to leverage their experience further.



(L to R) Dean, Chairman and Director on the dias



Mr. Alok Jain, Prof. Raghuram, Mr. Narayana Murthy and Swati Nigam at the inauguration



Prof. G. Raghuram takes a session



Participants mingle over tea

Some of the "pioneers" talk about what it's like to be trailblazers in breaking new ground at IIMA:

Swati Nigam, 28

"India is booming we plan to move back and what better place than IIM Ahmedabad to come to!" This from Swati



Nigam, one of the female participants in the PGPX. Married and living in Los Angeles, after a Bachelor of Engineering from Bombay University and a Masters in Computer Science from the University of Southern California, Swati first read about the PGPX two years ago. While there was slight apprehension at taking the

plunge, the sense of thrill was greater.

Meanwhile, she comes with a work experience of five years in ITT as a software design engineer, involved in manufacturing and designing radars. While the accommodation is nice, Swati prefers the old campus to the new one and is somewhat surprised at the small number of women in her programme. She sees herself working really hard for a year and plans to stay on in the 'tech' industry, but has come with an open mind.

Col. Ajay Sharma, 43

I joined the Indian Army through NDA as a 16 year old. One dream that every officer in Army grows with is to



command one's own unit (the one you get commissioned into). I was fortunate to get an opportunity to do just that from 2001 to 2004. Having served a full and satisfying innings in the army, I thought it was time to move on and seek more, which was not really 'on' within the highly structured layout of the armed forces. It was

while I was evaluating my switch options that IIMA launched PGPX. I saw it as a perfect vehicle to reach my goals, while making the transition smooth.

I came here to refine my managerial skills and redefine their confluence with my leadership qualities, so as to be

more in sync with the corporate environs. I do consider it unique and fortunate to have trained and studied at some of the finest institutes of India; viz. NDA Khadakwasla, DSSC Wellington, IITK and now IIMA. The structuring of the PGPX course and the participation guidelines suited my requirements, wherein I have got an opportunity to come together with 60 colleagues from varied background and different industry experiences. A synthesis of over 560 years of work experience should be a major takeaway for all of us. And who better to be the *sutradhar* in all this than IIMA!

The infrastructure planning and layout is absolutely world class. Although the facilities are still under construction, once complete, the new campus will indeed add to the already high image of the Institute. The academic activities did catch us unawares, to say the least. We are still trying to figure out how the days have become shorter or maybe the time moves faster here! Getting back to hardcore classroom studies is difficult, especially for people like me who have left not only school but even college decade ago. I never realized that helping my daughter do her homework will someday help me re-connect with books, assignments, CP and all. The selection of subjects, their clubbing and scheduling appears to be just right for the aim with which this course has been launched. The 'international immersion' is an exciting phase of the curriculum that each one of us is looking forward to.

The strength of the course is its batch size and the diversity of our respective backgrounds. The structuring of course dynamics ensures close bonding and interaction amongst all of us, which will go a long way in enhancing our knowledge and will provide us with an appropriate network in corporate functioning later on, as well. 'Family vs Academics' has been a conscious decision for every one of us and with the work load during the 'building blocks,' the outcome is obvious. Family considerations, per force, have to take a back seat during this one year. For those who are having their families on campus (courtesy excellent administrative arrangements made at (MDC), children can draw solace by comparing their marks with those of the parent!

The Institute seems to have done its homework and job well (as always). Now, the onus, of living up to the expectations of those who believe in this programme and of doing justice to the image of IIMA in the corporate world, lies squarely on the shoulders of 'PGPX Pioneers.'

"We are not competing against ISB."



Prof. G. Raghuram, Chairperson of the much discussed and awaited PGPX programme, talks to ALUMNUS about teaching people with experience, the pitch of the programme and competing against ISB:

Has the participants' profile come up to expectations?

Indeed, 30 out of 61 participants have professional or masters qualifications. The participant profile for the first PGPX 2006-07, with an average GMAT of 699.18, age of 31.6 years and work experience of over nine years, would be amongst the best in the world for a full-time, one-year MBAs course for executives.

Are the infrastructure facilities adequate, considering that many of them are married?

We had a shortage in providing married accommodation, as the demand exceeded the availability of 24 available houses. We had to make alternative arrangements like making participants stay at faculty suites and in a few houses on the old campus. Inside the accommodation, each room is fully furnished with air conditioner, television, refrigerator, telephone

We 61 have to rise to the occasion and justify the trust that has been reposed in us. As they say, "what you take away is dependent on what you give."

Sanghamitra Chakravarty, 31

Ten years into IT did actually make me realize that there were many things I was missing out on my career graph was progressing at a snail's pace. New entrants with an MBA degree also stole a large part of the show, while I was rising slowly. A crisp management degree was precisely what I was looking for. PGPX from IIMA couldn't possibly

have been better timed. Also, I did not want to go for a



connection and internet facility.

What is it like teaching people with experience?

The Term-I instructors felt that the preparation of participants for sessions was good. Initially, they found PGPX participants testing them, but at the same time committed for learning. One thing that all instructors felt was that in their initial sessions, the participants were more in the argument mode, compared to learning and grasping. The instructors had to put extra efforts to make them unlearn. Later, they felt that the participants' case analysis ability and quality of assignments improved. Preparation for the classes was above expectations and the ability to absorb improved.

Considering that we are competing against ISB, Hyderabad, which is a crucial factor, is the programme being pitched properly?

Basically, we are not competing with ISB. Their target segment is different. We take more experienced participants from diverse industry mix. In ISB's current batch of 418, the average age is 27 years against our batch of 61 having an average age of 31.5 years. The eligibility age to apply for PGPX is 27 years. Work-experience wise, PGPX participants have an average of more than nine years, as compared to ISB'S five years.

two-year programme after having this work experience. So no second thoughts went behind it; I had already made up my mind to take it up.

The "academic rigour" is a very decent way to put across what we all are going through an understatement, I would say. But on a more serious note, I can't think of a better way of keeping us hooked to the course. Talk about 100 percent devotion we are all actually thinking, eating and sleeping PGPX (in the last case, whatever little we can manage!)

Talking about ambience, it is inspiring us to stretch beyond our own limits. Getting back to academics after a gap is a refreshing break; nevertheless, much more challenging than it ever was. The curriculum is great; it is evident a great deal of research has gone into the selection and arrangement of the courses. All of us have considerable work experience in our specific fields. We are all undergoing the process of building a firm base at present, so the group is on a common platform.

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The teamwork and bonding, considering the diverse backgrounds, is great....talk about synergy! To be precise, the best of all worlds. All of us have so much to share and it's quite enriching. While I can't say for sure, I believe I'm balancing family life and academic life well. My daughter is a great help; we solve probability problems together! She really motivates me a lot and is just 17 months. I'm also learning that time management is not just about the hours of work it's also about the hours when you don't work. At times when I return back from classes, it quite resembles a hot, dusty Texas afternoon, but we being the pioneers, I think should discount few things which are, after all, slowly falling into place.

Noor Mohammed, 35

I have an Airline Transport Pilot's License (ATPL) and an MBA and have put in 13 years of service with Malaysia Airlines, the last six as a management pilot; of which the first four were as a Senior Instructor Pilot for the B737 fleet and the last two as a B737 Fleet Manager. I was looking after a fleet of 39 B737 and approximately 380 pilots and have about 7000 hours of flying time on the Boeing 737-400/BBJ, Airbus A330 and the Boeing 747-400. I'm currently staying at the Married Students Housing, on the new campus with my wife, mum (who will be here for a few weeks to help us settle down) and twins (who turned one on 3rd April!)

On completing my MBA (which I did part time) I became aware that to be really effective as a manager, I would need the challenge and knowledge that only a full time program can give. I had very set criteria on what I wanted in a program, and IIMA was the best among the options that I had. The Asia Pacific region is an interesting place to be at currently, and India is perhaps one of the best places for opportunities and growth. I wanted to experience a different perspective, yet something which I could use globally.

The academic rigor is, what can I say...unbelievable. I was warned of it even before I came, but the experience is close to being overwhelming at times. I have to add however that the quality of the faculty is very high, and that in itself is worth all the effort of coming here. The



Back to class after long

new campus is still very much coming up, thus there is some level of discomfort while the construction is going around. I do believe that once it is completed, the infrastructure would be a showcase for the capability and potential of higher learning institutions in India. One sad point that the wife often makes is that when this place is ready and beautiful in all its splendour, it would be time for us to leave already! I promised her that we would still be able to enjoy the sights when we return for reunions in the future!

It is not easy getting back to academics after a gap. In my past position, I had numerous support staff who provided me with data. Now, I have to sieve through a lot of the material and start the calculator and excel sheets humming half the night! It took me a few weeks to settle down slowly to the routine of preparation, classes and of course, the dreaded quizzes! One of the criteria I had set out for the curriculum was a case study pedagogy. I believe it is perhaps the best method available and so far I see no reason to doubt that I have made the right decision. As mentioned, the faculty puts in a lot of preparation and it really makes a difference. As there are only 61 one of us, we have more opportunities to get to know each other better and faster. The experiences that my course mates bring is a major plus. Business is dynamic and there is no text book as good as real life. At this stage of our lives, I think we are aware that in the larger scheme of things, it is not a 'zero sum' game. Thus, we are trying our best to maximise the benefits we can obtain. The way things are going, I believe that we will succeed.

My wife has been wonderful. Few, the first weeks were very difficult. A new country, a foreign language, the

extreme heat and a new residence next to a construction zone is difficult enough without the added challenge of two infants and a husband who is perpetually studying. We are still trying to find a mutually beneficial balance, and ensure that the babies still get to spend some quality time with their parents. This is the first batch of the PGPX program and some minor hiccups are expected. I am however very impressed by the efforts put in by all parties to make this program a success. I would have to single out the Chairperson, Prof Raghuram, for the interest, concern and dedication that he has shown, be it for the academic or the lifestyle matters that crop up. When the Chairperson himself pops in during your group discussion at one in the morning, he is sending a message of "I am with you as you go through this journey." It is very comforting and it is these personal details, much more than the impressive infrastructure that will make PGPX a success.

James Deeson, 30

I have a Bachelor's in Social Sciences (Economics) from the University of Birmingham, UK and am an Associate Chartered Accountant from the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales (ICAEW). I was with KPMG's London office for six years, as Audit Manager in the Industrial Products audit department. I also taught undergraduate courses in Economics and Finance at Beijing Language University for a year and was with Promax Consulting, Beijing, for over a year and a half; working on projects, helping small Chinese companies search for private equity.



I chose the PGPX course due to it being what I was looking for, in terms years of work experience and subject focus; as well as the outstanding reputation of IIM in India and for the opportunity to study in India. I find the academic rigour and ambience here very good. The curriculum is also very well structured. It is a bit strange starting to study full time again after a long gap but one quickly gets back into it. The groups and batch, as a whole, have a very strong level of unity and cooperation. Difference in backgrounds has not been an issue.

Arminster Kaur, 35

I have an MCA and close to 12 years of work experience in e-learning industry. My most recent place of residence has been Chennai. I had reached a stage in my career where I wanted to do more than I was being offered in my job. I knew I needed an MBA to be able to change over. PGPX came at just the right time when I was exploring options worldwide for one-year MBAs.



It's tough getting back to academics after a gap. I thought I was used to working hard even putting in 10-12 hrs a day. Now, when I look back, it seems like child's play. I am wondering if the reason IIMA students do well is because after this experience, the 'real' world seems easier! The vigour is what makes this Institute famous and I wouldn't have it any other way! It is also an honor to be 'subjected' to this experience and I wouldn't change it for anything. The unrelenting stream of quizzes, assignments, presentations, reports and so forth is stretching all of us and I am constantly discovering that I am capable of doing and learning more. The curriculum is extremely well-designed and at par with most of the prestigious one-year MBAs being offered globally. However, I do sometimes wonder if we are missing out on the depth of content being offered to PGP. I am also worried that I might never get enough time to fully explore and benefit from the Institute's knowledge sources. However, I am hopeful that it might happen later this year.

The teamwork and bonding is different from where we studied earlier. All of us have worked for at least seven years and we are used to working in teams and interacting with people from diverse backgrounds. As for balancing family life and academic life....what family life?!! There are only academics this year. On a serious note, I am here by myself and hence, spared from the challenges that some of my classmates are facing. However, most of them are doing an admirable job and are supported by their families in the most amazing way.

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Lekshmi Kumar, 29

I'm from Trivandrum, where I did my B.Sc. (Agriculture) from Kerala Agricultural University and M.Sc.



(Environmental Sciences) from Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. I was based in Moscow from 2001 to 2005, working as a Senior Manager (Projects) in *Rusroyal Ltd.*, a Russian firm. I was looking out for a one-year MBA from a

world-renowned b-School. Once I came to know that IIMA was about to start its first PGPX, I narrowed down my choice to this programme.

The academic rigour was very demanding during the first few weeks, but in about a month's time, I got used to it sleeping for three to four hours a day and now one really belongs to the place. For me, it's back to school after a gap of five years (one of the least in the class, I

believe). Quite different from the earlier studies, as people around are more mature. The curriculum is very relevant, aimed at creating 'thinking leaders;' which course content is diverse without any distinct specialisation. Fellow participants are storehouses of knowledge and represent extremely diverse backgrounds, providing a great learning opportunity; especially for members of the study groups. Team work is fantastic, each person contributing to the learning of the group.

I have a three-year old son, who has started going to school. My parents and in-laws take turns and be with me on campus to look after him. The worst part of my life here is that I get to spend less time with him; can't even go with him to school when he is embarking on his own journey to the world of knowledge and learning. My husband is working in Moscow, and plans to come to the campus every two to three months. 

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