

Practice School

*T*he concept of *Practice School* is, without question, one of the most

unique features of the BITSian education system. Organising this tool to University-Industry linkage is the *Practice School Division*, popularly called the PSD.

Starting out modestly with just twelve members, the PSD has grown over the years both in terms of facilities and members. The Practice School feature, which it started two decades ago, is made available to students of every discipline in BITS. Today the PS mode enjoys far greater demand than the alternative *Thesis* programme. The fact that students' ID numbers are automatically initialised to the 'PS' tag upon admission is an index of its popularity.

The Practice School (PS) feature comprises two parts: PS1 and PS2. While all students on campus generally do the first, the second is optional; one may opt to do a thesis instead. According to the institute, the PS programme commonly has up to around 1400 students a year. Arrangements for PS are made at close to 180 stations in India and abroad. Given that so much goes into the PS feature, we at CF set out to find out how much the BITSian students know about (or bother about!) it.

Idealism runs high among the young, they say. And so it is with the first-yearites, many of whom would love to do their PS1 in the best available place on the PSD map. What are the top preferences? Lots of choices are forthcoming, with the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Mumbai, topping the list.

The perception among second-year students is tinged with realism; no more high-profile aspirations. "Oh, there's this company really close to my home..." Home is top priority now. We just assumed the 5-unit component wasn't really energising for our 'wannabe' engineers. Perhaps that explains the It-was-just-another-way-of-spending-the-hols looks on the faces of those returning from PS1.

Come PS2 and it's a different story altogether! Perhaps it's the sudden third-year realization that you have just one more semester to spend on campus? Or maybe the feeling that doing a Practice School for close to six months is something serious? A 20-unit component, there are few who don't take PS2 seriously.

By mid-February, students find out which semester they're "on-campus". We have a few heartbreaks and a few tears shed during this time. True, students are allowed preferences,



mirror, mirror on our world...



but finally the allotments are purely the PSD's call. They have to make sure that the number of final year students staying on campus is roughly the same number as the number going for their PS2 every semester. For those who are part of the dual-degree programme, the structure offers the facility of choosing the PS2 option either for one semester or for both the semesters in their fifth year. However, a person choosing a "double-semester PS" would find it quite difficult to appear for the campus interviews conducted since students are allowed on campus for only one week during the progress of their PS2. Keeping this in mind, most of the dualites prefer to stay on campus for one semester to do a thesis, bag a safe job, and then go for their PS2.

Here is what some people had to say about the importance of PS:

“ To begin with, PS does give us a chance to experience a real life work environment with all its nuances. I learnt – or rather, could have learnt – about all the operations and processes in a manufacturing company. This includes both technical or engineering operations and also planning and scheduling, inventory maintenance and other administrative and organisational aspects of the industry.”

“Leaving aside what I actually learnt, PS did expose me to an environment with great opportunity to learn. We also came across many people during the period. People of all shapes and sizes, of various shades and mentalities, and usually from all the social strata. From the unskilled labourers and gatekeepers to managers and all the way up to the head of the company, we meet quite a few people. It takes a lot to stay and work with all kinds of people. A lot of them are professionals with loads of experience. The projects executed at any company would obviously be a present-day, real-life affair and one can observe the current trends and latest technology and equipment in use.”

Whatever be the opinions, most students find that the stint at PS helps at their job. It has happened on many occasions that the students directly get absorbed into the company in which they do their PS. That's the reason why 99 percent prefer it to a thesis. That's the reason it's called Practice School.

