

Pleasant visit to IIT Kanpur (July 24-25, 2016)

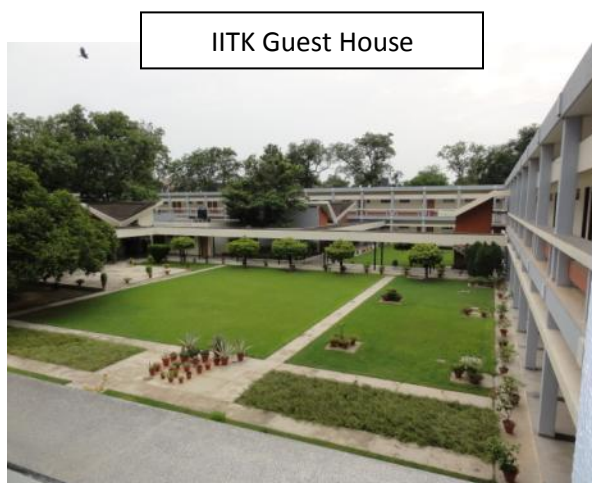
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1. I was invited by Prof. Manas Ghorai (Head of Counseling) and his team at IIT Kanpur (my alma mater) to deliver inspirational lectures to incoming [post-graduate \(PG\)](#) and [undergraduate \(UG\)](#) students.
2. I thoroughly enjoyed this experience. Around [500+ PG](#) and [1000+ UG](#) students enjoyed the lectures (held in main auditorium) since the question/answers session in both lectures stretched to almost one hour. The PG students gave me a standing ovation after the lecture.



3. My lecture/discussion was scheduled for one hour but both sessions lasted for about 1.5 hours. Finally the student counselors had to restrain the enthusiastic students from asking any more questions. Nevertheless the discussion with students continued outside the auditorium.

4. The student counselors told me that there were quite a number of phone calls from parents and students that this was the best talk given during the orientation program.
5. The whole show of orientation program is managed very professionally by the very energetic Prof. Ghorai and his equally energetic team of about 25 UG and PG students. I think this is the best orientation program among all IITs. I wish we had such a thing in our times.
6. This year Kanpur got good rains and so the campus was lush and green with neatly manicured lawns. The campus has lots of trees and thus IITK presents a very pretty site to the visitors.



Trees lining the road outside Guest House

7. At the same time IITK campus looks like an over-grown village. One can now get everything on the campus; there are hawkers for chaat; fruit-thelas; tea-thelas, etc. near the Hall II and III; and mini bazaar, hair cutting saloon, tailoring shop, mobile phone shop, even footpath bicycle shop, etc. near other halls. So one does not have to go far for



day-to-day necessities. For other shopping the students go to the nearby mall in Kalyanpur. Some students also told me that large number of items are ordered online so daily delivery trucks from Amazon, Flipkart, etc. come to the campus.

8. On 25th July evening Prof. Ghorai gave a dinner in my honor where the Dean of Student affairs together with other faculty members associated with various student activities joined the counseling team. Thus about 25-30 people were present. The food was delicious with excellent fish, chicken and vegetarian food.
9. Quite a number of students involved in the counseling services and orientation program have outstanding academic record (their CPI's > 8.5). That they are able to maintain such high academic standards while being very much involved in helping other students tells a lot about their dedication. I was told that largely because of such initiative the number of suicides by students has reduced.
10. Manas Ghorai has given these students tremendous freedom and hence they managed the whole 6 day function of orientation very nicely. This orientation program requires a high degree of professionalism, planning and execution and students did it admirably with very good time management. To manage close to 2000 students through the six days orientation program is quite a task. The schedule for both [PGs](#) and [UGs](#) show the extent of the orientation activities.

11. It was a pleasure interacting with the counseling students. They are sharp, well informed and articulate. Quite a few among them would like to go for teaching profession and few of them want to do something different rather than the usual “getting a job” scene. This augurs well and is different from many other IITs where the focus is only getting high paid job.
12. Quite a few students told me that the flexible course work attracted them to IITK. A student can take quite a number of elective courses in almost any field including humanities-something that the rigid system of other IITs do not allow. IITK therefore has continued its U.S. universities based flexible-course tradition.
13. I feel that because of the flexible course and education system of IITK quite a few of the graduates, through years, have gone and done many out-of-the-ordinary things; whether it is in the field of journalism, politics, social service, religious calling, rural development, etc. etc. Maybe somebody ought to do a comparison among different IITs on what “out of the ordinary things” have their alumni done. I also feel that it is this “out of the ordinary” that differentiates the IITs from each other and also from other engineering colleges.
14. I visited few rooms in Hall II and III and found that there are 3 students per room. The fresh PGs were also staying in Hall II. This situation has risen because there has been a delay in the completion of new Hall 12. Once it is ready (by August/September end), I am sure the crunch will be over.
15. Some of the students who were staying three to a room were nevertheless cheerful about the situation. They said that they come only to sleep in their rooms since all the labs, computer centers and library provide them enough facilities (read air-conditioned environment) to study. I got a feeling that for a short time the students don't mind staying in such cramped conditions. It is their parents and some others who incite them and create problems.

16. Almost all the students I met (both UGs and PGs) were extremely happy with the IIT education and experience. They felt that IITK education has changed them and made them a better person something that I also stressed in my lectures. I am delighted that this path to excellence has continued.

17. Yet there were few jarring notes during this pleasant visit:

(a) There is a tremendous proliferation of cursing among the students. They somehow cannot utter a single sentence without expletives. I had heard about this from others and saw it first hand when I visited some rooms unannounced.

(b) I was told that there is an increase in drugs (*Ganja/charas*) taking by students. Also the increase in drinking. I discussed this with the Deans and they were also aware of this problem and through the counseling process are making all efforts to educate the students. I think the students can be helped by continuous education.

(c) The rooms I visited in Hall II, I and IV were filthy with beds unmade and things all over the room and even outside in the corridors. I don't remember rooms being so dirty during our times. Besides teaching them technical education, I feel the students should also be taught lessons in cleanliness. "Swachh Bharat Abhiyan" should start from their rooms!

18. I could not leave Kanpur without paying homage to Ganges. The mighty Ganga was in spate and was flowing just below the danger mark at Ganga barrage. Yet the flood sight was magnificent and do hope that IITK excellence flows like the Ganges!



[HOME](#)