

About turn

Students from the US are coming to India in large numbers for their internship. Earlier, it was mainly for social work. Today, they are exploring corporate jobs. A Team **India Now** report.

Just a few years ago, students at the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) were falling over each other to get internships abroad. "You saw the world, you made some money and you hoped they would offer you a job one year down the line when you completed your programme," says Girish Marathe, an alumnus of IIM Calcutta.

Now the boot is on the other foot. It's the students of Ivy League colleges such as Yale, Harvard and Columbia, who are scrambling for internships in Indian companies. "At Infosys, a world leader in consulting and information technology services, the applicant pool is 10,000," says The Princeton Review. "The number of positions available is 125."

At the Bangalore-based Infosys, meanwhile, the global internship programme, styled InStep, is humming with activity. The company describes InStep as "a platform for students from top academic institutions around the world to work on live technical and business projects, ranging from application development to business consulting." Says a company official: "It's been a big hit ever since we started in 1999."

Infosys may be right up there with the leaders. But it is not the only Indian company attracting interns. Other information technology (IT) majors, like TCS and Satyam, are keeping it company. TCS has established partnership models with various universities. For instance, it has signed a memorandum of understanding with Toronto's York University, Canada's third largest university. Says the company: "As part of the TCS-York University alliance,

York students will gain exposure to TCS' mature processes, technologies and tools already in place. Not only will York students have the opportunity for hands-on participation in current TCS projects, but top York students and TCS researchers will also be able to share knowledge, skills and experiences."

It's not just in IT, where Indian companies do command high mindshare amongst US students. Amanda James did her internship at Maharashtra Hybrid Seed Co (Mahyco). "I conducted a market and farmer survey to gain knowledge about Indian agriculture," says she. "My internship experience helped confirm my interest and enthusiasm for global development studies and international agriculture and food security issues. My career goals have become more focused in response to my internship."

Like James, there are others heading for non-IT companies. And they have enough choice. Indian companies offering internships to foreign students include India's second largest bank ICICI Bank, steel maker Tisco, motorcycle manufacturer Eicher, tractor maker Mahindra & Mahindra and biotech star Biocon.

There are no hard records on how many foreign interns are coming to work in Indian companies annually. The National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) is trying to build a database. But that will be only for the IT and related sectors. A rough guesstimate puts the figure at well over 2,000. Apart from the work experience, "India is culturally fulfilling," NASSCOM president Kiran Karnik said recently. "I expect a bigger horde of students to arrive next year



because the ones here said they had a great time and will go home to talk about it."

It's a two-way process. First, Indian companies are globalising in a big way. They need international talent. Companies like Wipro, Infosys, HCL and Satyam have been visiting foreign campuses - Wharton, Stanford and Harvard, for instance - for recruitment purposes. It helps a great deal if the students are already aware of their work culture.

"Initially, we had to overcome a lot of problems," admits an HR (human resources) manager at one of these companies. "India was regarded as a land of snake charmers and fakirs. We got almost zero response in our recruitment efforts.

"We decided that there was another way to go about it," she continues. "If you offer a six-week internship, students look

upon it favourably as there are no long-term strings attached. Initially, they came to India because it was exotic. It was regarded as a paid holiday. Now, of course, all that has changed."

The first bunch of students went back and their experiences worked on the mindsets of their classmates. Today, on US campuses, internship at, say, TCS or Infosys is regarded as a valuable addition to your CV. Even companies in the US - where most of these interns still end up - regard it as very useful work experience. "You are seeing a big change in the sort of people that are coming to India," says the HR manager quoted earlier.

Behind it all is the fact that India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies. Sure, there is China, which is a notch ahead. But China has a language problem; you need to know Chinese if you are to get

anywhere. In India, on the other hand, you can get by with English.

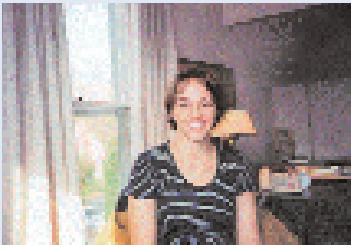
There are exceptions. James of Grinnell College, Iowa, who interned at Mahyco, had a problem because she was working with farmers in the hinterland. But Mahyco laid on all the support she wanted; there was an interpreter available.

It doesn't always happen that way, particularly for local interns. "Most companies in India treat domestic summer placements as a necessary evil," says a company spokesperson. "It's with a hope that they will catch the right fish who could join them later. This is largely true of engineering interns. It doesn't work because many of them get into management and abandon their engineering background. During their summer placement as engineering students, we have to expose them to engineering. How does this count when, even



INTERNATIONAL TALENT: Initially, they came to India because it was exotic. It was regarded as a paid holiday. Now, of course, all that has changed

BRAND AMBASSADORS



Amanda James
Grinnell College, Iowa, USA
Mahyco, Jalna

"We learned a lot of development paradigms. We learned about Gandhi's and Nehru's ideas of development. It was interesting to see that there are several farmers, who still promote Gandhi's view of subsistence farming."



Evelyn Kao
Wharton, Pennsylvania, USA
Infosys, Bangalore

"My internship at Infosys gave me the unique opportunity to not only work with amazing people and learn about an impressive organisation, but was also a stimulating experience from a cultural, social, and intellectual point of view."



Haady Taslim
University of Chicago, USA
UNICEF, Tamil Nadu

"I am here to make a positive contribution, not to judge or impose our views. I know we are here as interns. But I would have no hesitation in coming back to work in India after completing my education."



ATTRACTING THE BEST: Interns at the Infosys campus in Bangalore

if they want to return to us, they want to do so as managers."

Foreign interns, on the other hand, seem surer about what they want to do. They are the early birds, anyway: they have sought out internships in India before it becomes completely fashionable. Besides, the company has to pick up the tabs for all their expenses. Once you factor in the plane fare, it works out to quite a bomb.

"Infosys bears the visa fees, airfare expenditure, both from home country to an international airport in India, and from there to Bangalore, the cost of local transport, and boarding and lodging expenses. Facilities available on the campus to Infosys — be it the library or recreational facilities — are thrown open to interns," says Transitions Abroad, a company that publishes several magazines on living, studying and working abroad. "In effect, the stipend can be used for shopping, entertainment, and travel. And in case there is a balance left, you can even repatriate it back home."

But why are companies prepared to pay out such hefty sums? Infosys founder and chief mentor N.R. Narayana Murthy has pointed out that these students work as brand ambassadors for the company and the country. It's not that they will come back to India to work for Infosys. It has happened, but is not considered an im-

mediate objective.

More importantly, as Infosys globalises, it will need to take on key executives abroad. Currently, companies of its ilk have been tapping the ethnic Indian community or sending executives from India. But this is a limited pool: if you set up shop in the US, you have to employ Americans. The internship programme is a key component of the Infosys plan to acquire top of mind awareness.

As for the students themselves, they can read the writing on the wall. There is lot of noise being made today about job losses in the US and other western countries and their movement to India. But that's really a bogey. Research shows that outsourcing is responsible for job creation in the US too. The net effect is positive.

There is a canner breed, however. They see the US as a stagnant market with a humble 2-3 per cent growth. The real excitement in the future will be in India and China. Ask Rohit Madan (name changed), who has just turned down a \$100,000 a year US placement offer from an American consultancy. "New York may be the Big Apple," says this final-year student at IIM Ahmedabad. "But New Jalpaiguri is the battleground of the future."

He is not alone. This year, at least 20 of his compatriots have turned down dollar salaries to take up assignments offering just a fifth of the package in the boondocks of India. Through word of mouth, students in the US are realising the reason why. He who can comes to India; he who cannot settles for a sedentary job in sleepy Sacramento. 🌈

On the Web
Infosys InStep:
www.infosys.com/InStepWeb/default.htm
Satyam: www.satyam.com
TCS: www.tcs.com