

Dubai and India Trip Report (v. 2.1)

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I recently returned from a trip to Dubai and India on behalf of MSOE. Here is a summary of my activities, observations and ideas:

Dubai – Manipal University Branch Campus

With the slowing of the world and Dubai economies and the opening of several new institutions, the educational market in Dubai has become brutally competitive (Michigan State is reportedly offering 2 for 1 tuition deals at their branch campus in Dubai). The Manipal U.-Dubai campus has managed to stay in the black by carefully controlling their costs.

We have a 2+2 arrangement between their Media and Communications (M&C) program and our Technical Communications (TC) program. They also started a 4 year engineering program last year. They are currently renting lab space for their lab classes.

I met with their director. He continues to be interested in working with MSOE in any reasonable way. His impression is that economic uncertainty may keep some families from committing to sending their kids to MSOE.

I spoke to all their 1st and 2nd year M&C students. I told them about what TCs do and about MSOE (features, costs, application process, etc.). I also spoke to all (about 80) of their engineering students. There really wasn't a recruiting angle so I mostly talked about the common features of engineering educations regardless of where you study.

Dubai – Accepted Student & Alumni

I met with accepted student Scott Morris and his mom. I also met with MSOE alumni Kourosh Moaref, BE '98, Perfusion '00 (who has founded and is operating a medical device company) and Yvette Wibowo, EE '94.

Manipal – ICAS (2+2) Program

I met with the director of the ICAS program, Dr. GMJ Bhat, and about a dozen students. I presented the program with a copy of "Contemporary Electric Circuits: Insights and Analysis (2nd Edition)" by Strangeway, Petersen, Gassert & Lokken for the MIT library. I discussed the following with the director:

He told me that schools in England (Sheffield & Nottingham) are accepting ICAS courses for credit even when the students fail them as long as they have marks of > 60%.

We discussed the possibility of thinking of ICAS students as “transitioning” to MSOE from ICAS rather than transferring. Since ICAS is intended to be the first 2 years of their students’ education it is more like our students going from their sophomore to junior years than a student coming to MSOE from outside. This would imply anything better than a 2.0 GPA should be accepted for admission of ICAS students.

We discussed the difference between “backs” and “retains” in the Indian system and the difference in the way GPAs are calculated between MSOE and ICAS. For example, we concluded that clearing a back is much like replacing a grade in our system. On the other hands, once a student passes a course at ICAS, there is no way he or she can replace the grade.

Manipal – ICEDSP ’09 Conference

The primary purpose of my trip was to present an invited paper at the ICEDSP ’09 conference organized by the Manipal Institute of Technology (MIT) Department of Electronics and Communications Engineering (ECE) and the IEEE Bangalore Section. My paper, entitled “Experience with Novel Biomedical Engineering Curricula,” seemed well received even though most of the other papers presented at the conference were more technical.

It was very clear than engineering programs in India are much more academic than those in the U.S. in general and at MSOE in particular. Design is clearly not emphasized in their programs, while it was a major aspect of the BE curricula describe in my paper. Indian engineering programs stress preparation for graduate study rather than industrial employment. In fact, there is a trend for companies to require that graduates attend a 6 month to 1 year long “finishing school” to gain more practical knowledge and skills (Later I learned that the India government requires (or at least provides incentives) that companies hire a certain faction of new graduates).

This may provide MSOE with an opportunity. I suggest we investigate developing a finishing program for graduates of Indian engineering schools. Such a program would stress design, documentation and business topics. It could be taught here or there.

Conference organizers were very appreciative of MSOE’s support of the conference (MSOE bought an ad in the program book and I paid for my membership even though as an invited speaker they were willing to comp it). I also presented them with a print from the Grohmann museum.

The conference itself was very similar to an equivalent conference in the US with two major differences. First, there were a lot more formalities. They had formal opening and closing

ceremonies and mementos were presented to guests and session chairs. Second, the questioning of presenters was much more aggressive than I've ever seen at U.S. meetings.

At the closing ceremonies of the conference, which included an "open mike" session for participant feedback, I presented Brig (Dr) Somnath Mishra (Retd), the Director of MIT, with a print from the Grohmann museum.

I made a point to meet faculty members from other schools while at the conference, including Dr. Fatimah Ibrahim (a Marquette graduate) from the University of Malaya. Dr. Ibrahim expressed an interest in working with us. I also met Dr. Reza Saathi from Sheffield Hallam University in England and Dr. V. Prithivira from Pondicherry Engineering College in Pondicherry, India. Dr. Prithivira expressed a strong interest in working with us as he is considering developing a BE program at his university. He also helped me catch my flight out of Mangalore that he nearly made me miss by wanting to stop for tea on the way to the airport – but that's another story.

Delhi – Student Family & Alumnus

I met with the family of current student Prakhar Kapoor upon my arrival in Delhi. My visit with them was primarily social, although it did lead to me meeting Bipin Kapoor (Prakhar's cousin). Bipin is the director of Satra Industries, a forge and machining company that makes automotive and tractor parts. He is very willing to work with MSOE to provide factory tours if we were to do a student study trip to India at some point (see my comments regarding my WisdomMart meetings below).

I also went to dinner with Rotash Chawla (ME '96). Rotash operates a garment manufacturing company. His past customers included the Gap and Old Navy, but recently business has been slow. He is interested in networking through MSOE's alumni office to find new business opportunities.

Delhi – WisdomMart (a test preparation and educational consulting service)

I met with the director of WisdomMart, Pankaj Jain. In our discussion, he indicated:

He is open to joining an association and/or becoming certified as an international recruiting agency (for example, by AIRC (<http://www.airc-education.org/Home.htm>)).

Based on market demand, his agency has mostly shifted to helping would be graduate students, but they still have some undergraduate clients. He thinks this shift is due in part to the opening of numerous new private engineering colleges in India. I question the quality of some of these schools, but they are much less expensive than MSOE.

He may have some students that are currently enrolled in undergraduate engineering programs in India interested in transferring to MSOE to complete their degrees.

He is willing and interested in submitting a proposal regarding compensation. We need to send him an outline and some guidance regarding our expectations.

He is very interested in helping to arrange study tours to India (we could also use my contacts at Manipal University and elsewhere for this).

While at the WisdomMart office, I also made a presentation to about a dozen interested students in a group and spoke separately with 2 students and their moms.

Singapore and Malaysian Opportunities

A recurring theme during this trip was possible opportunities for MSOE in Singapore and Malaysian. As I learned recently while helping Caleb Black process the transcripts for a student we enrolled from Singapore, their school system is considered one of the best in the world. In fact, many US universities give students from Singapore a year of credit for their last year of high school. I had discussions during almost every stop on my trip regarding the educational and economic situation in Singapore and Malaysian. This appears something that MSOE should investigate with the intent of getting a head start on our competition (at least in Malaysian).

India vs. China

Another theme that emerged is the ongoing and growing competition between India and China. At least among the academics and business people I talked to, there appears to be an effort to position India as a slightly higher cost, but significantly higher quality producer. There was also talk of Indian companies not requiring advance payment as do many Chinese companies. I need to investigate these claims with someone with having a greater knowledge of China. The implications for MSOE are not clear, but should be considered.

Other

I posted photos of my trip on Facebook at:

<http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=2025213&id=52501777&l=71eb6ea415>. You do not have to be a Facebook member to view them.