



From innovative non-classroom education initiatives to enhance skills and attitudes and internships in rural NGOs, SPJIMR focuses on the holistic creation of managers.

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We will put industry connect and local relevance first and then take them to the world. - Dr. Banerjee

Innovator, design thinker, scenario planner, top management facilitator, consultant and management educator, meet Dr. Ranjan Banerjee, Dean – S.P. Jain Institute of Management & Research, Mumbai (SPJIMR) since June 2015. Dr. Banerjee brings with him decades of experience in the fields of academics & corporate. He has founded Renaissance Strategic Consultants, worked and managed functions in FMCG companies like Asian Paints, Vadilal and Hindustan Unilever & has taught courses on Marketing, Strategy, Behavioural Economics, Innovation, etc. at leading Indian and international institutes like IIM Calcutta, Great Lakes, Symbiosis, IIT-SOM, Singapore Management University and Carlson School of Management, USA.

He has been rated among the best teachers in every institute he is associated with. A course he taught to 104 students at the Carlson School received perfect feedback scores on all dimensions from the class, and he received department and institute level teaching awards!

He is truly a great teacher, motivator and thought-process leader. HTCampus caught up with this dynamic personality on his views on future of management, promising courses and careers in management and his plans for SPJIMR to scale it up by some notches.

Excerpts from the interview:

From a versatile corporate world, how does getting back into academics feel?

I have always straddled the worlds of high level consulting and academics. Right now, getting back into academics feels wonderful. This is largely because of the opportunity to interact with young students on a day to day basis. I believe consulting and executive education are important ways for faculty to influence current practice, and in that sense, I am very much in touch with the versatile corporate world.

Now that you are a member of management, what kind of changes in terms of responsibilities have you experienced?

It is really a move from leading a consulting company to leading an academic institution. The largest change is in terms of having to lead a stellar faculty team, many of whom are better than you in many respects. In a situation where academics are traditionally used to working independently, building institutional alignment and creating a positive buzz across the board are large emphases. Also the variety of stakeholders- staff, students, faculty, alumni, corporates - implies that you have to wear multiple different hats on a day to day basis.

As the new Dean, what will be your primary focus on SPJIMR?

At SPJIMR, we aim to be leaders in:

- Innovation
- Social responsibility

Our mission has always been to influence practice, and we will achieve this through:

- Proactive industry connect
- Focus on action research
- Building faculty as thought leaders

What changes, can anyone expect from SPJIMR in the next 1 year?

- Enhancement of student living experience
- Introduction of design thinking and a growth mindset in core curricula
- Deeper collaboration with industry
- Collaboration with the best global faculty on research projects,
- Systematic investment in faculty development,
- High emphasis on faculty student connect in every program
- Shift to more engaging teaching methods in every program

Most of the changes are already initiated. A willingness to listen and learn will drive our interactions with every stakeholder.



Global exposure VS industry connects – which is more important?

As Indian industry itself is becoming more global, this will never be an/or, it will be an and. We will put industry connect and local relevance first - we will first build ideas for our catchment in partnership with the best academics in the world, and then take them to the world. We also ensure that our courses are strongly immersed in current industry practice, and exposed to industry and the social sector through internships. We also send students to international universities for advanced coursework.

Currently all students of our two year and one year MBA programs do a month of advanced coursework in institutions like Cornell, CMU, Darden, Purdue etc. So, for us it is always both.

What is the scope for a MBA in Marketing major?

Extremely high, with many new sectors emerging which need marketers. The growth in scope is in new areas like Marketing Analytics, Digital Media etc. The demand for professional marketers is growing in sectors like E-Commerce and Services. The entire financial services scenario is changing

rapidly, and there is a lot of need at the interface between technology, finance and marketing and multi faceted graduates will be needed.

Considering that the dynamics of management is changing, what are the new age MBA specialisations that have a bright future in India?

Analytics is one that comes to my mind. Entrepreneurship is not a specialization, but an area of interesting impact. We also think that there are more jobs at the interaction point between specializations, and we are introducing the option of combining a major specialization with a minor specialization in our two year MBA.

What is your opinion of pursuing MBA from India VS MBA from abroad? Reasons?

I think the top schools in India are better than or as competitive as many leading international schools in terms of:

- Quality of students
- Quality of teaching
- Relevance of content to India

If the intention is to stay in India and build a career out of India, a Top 10 Indian B-school is a good choice. If moving abroad is a priority, then an international MBA from a good school is a good option. However, SPJIMR and some others offer a best of both worlds scenario today - there are programmes which offer you a chance to spend a semester with us and a semester at a top European school and these are interesting options to explore for those intending to settle abroad.

What is the USP of SPJIMR? Why should a student opt for SPJIMR? What would you say is the signature course of SPJIMR?

- Value education through non-classroom based methods
- Many faculty with work experience and hence practical inputs
- Willingness to experiment with innovative pedagogy in the classroom

Our signature courses include the use of simulations, a unique course called the Science of Spirituality which combines traditional Indian spiritual wisdom with modern neuroscience. The fact that all our students in our flagship one year and two year programs do a month of advanced specialized courses in top universities like Cornell, CMU, Darden etc is an added plus.

Overall, it is the emphasis on a holistic value based education which allows you to discover yourself - the SPJIMR experience is the differentiator. Combine this with our location in India's commercial capital and the fact that we have recently been ranked in the top three in India for placements, and you have a fairly strong combination.

SPJIMR offers short term courses besides the residential courses. What kind of advantage can a student have by pursuing these courses?

Very often, short-term programs are targeted at people who are already employed and then sharpen the axe. A MBA degree is an education for a career. However content, context, theory and practice are continually being upgraded and even for MBAs from top schools, short-term programs have great relevance. You also have running businesses where senior managers may not have the time to invest in a full MBA, but need focused inputs in a specific domain area-short term programs fill this need.

With multiple start-ups doing the rounds in India, how well do you think they will fare? Are they sustainable?

The start-ups which are backed by sound business models, and which have thought deeply about execution will have a future. Yes, start-ups are sustainable if:

- The owners have a deep immersion in the context they have to serve
- Marry technology and consumer insight in an interesting way
- Do not try to build a business purely on valuations.

Too many businesses are trying to similar things-startups driven by some kind of herd mentality in selection of domains and models will run into trouble.

You have been teaching both at domestic and international colleges for the last few years. What are the primary differences in education/ teaching methodology in both domains?

Internationally, a course is a two way contract and expectations are clear both ways. The discipline in terms of pre-class preparation is higher outside India. Also, teaching styles are less hierarchical. Further, many faculty are good researchers and bring their research into the classroom.

In India, we have many charismatic teachers, but there is less research. We still tend to be hierarchical in our approach, and we are behind in terms of two-way learning in the classroom. However, the faculty is very well read and in SPJIMR, we have many faculty who were formerly senior corporate executives, with a deep knowledge of practice. Thus, a lot of our teaching is practice oriented. Where we lack is in bringing our own research driven knowledge into the classroom. We are taking steps to change this.

If you were to pick up/ embrace one aspect each from the colleges you've taught at, what would they be?

- IIM Calcutta: Rigour in quantitative and economic courses, a lot of freedom given to students, a less regimental approach.
- Great Lakes: Quality of infrastructure and teaching administration
- Symbiosis: Easy going, high energy student culture
- IIT-SOM: Quality of campus experience
- SMU, Carlson: Professional course management, interactivity in the classroom, student discipline, transparency in evaluation

Given your vast experience in the FMCG sector and corporate, do you think there is a skill gap in the management graduates vs demand of the industry?

Essentially, most B-schools focus more on tools and techniques, and not enough on skills and attitudes. Many students have limited experience, and this means that they cannot always extract relevance and apply tools effectively.

If yes, how can one address that? Is intervention from industry necessary? And should it be part of the curriculum?

We do many things right at SPJIMR. We use our innovative non-classroom education initiatives to enhance skills and attitudes. Our students do summer internships in rural NGOs. Under a globally recognized program called Abhyudaya, each student of our flagship MBA program mentors a municipal school student from an urban slum for the whole of the first year.

Industry engagement is essential. For our flagship programs, we have area advisory committees which meet regularly and comprise industry leaders. They review curriculum at least once a year. We also integrate live projects into many a course.

Is SPJIMR looking at curriculum up-gradation to be more in sync with industry?

Yes, through area advisory committees and proactive industry outreach. This is something we have always been doing, but we are accelerating this. We also have many courses where industry projects are embedded into the course itself, and we will do more of this. We have innovative industry-academia exchange projects planned.

Often, we have students who are confused between choosing course vs college. What should be the correct approach?

I think good institutes will ensure that all their courses are well managed and run. I would suggest that as long as the courses are in place for more than 5 years, the college reputation should suffice. For a new course from a reputed college, students need to scrutinize both curricula and placement plans carefully. There are of course specific rankings by subject. For which students should look at credible rankings, alumni feedback and placement.

What would you advice 2015 aspirants of CAT, XAT or GMAT and other MBA exams to do to nail it?

These tests are always time pressure tests. Practice under simulated conditions and time yourself. Try giving yourself fifteen minutes less than the actual time for the test. You will learn to prioritize, use heuristics, make good decisions under pressure, and most importantly, not panic in a time crunch.