



Why HEIs are trying to raise the happiness quotient

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Happiness seems to be a recurring theme in curriculums across higher educational institutions (HEIs). Though the happiness programme for children in class I to VIII was first started by the Government of Delhi in July 2018 to improve the mental well-being of pupils, its focus on mindfulness, social emotional-learning, critical thinking and problem-solving have earned ardent advocates in HEIs as well.

Few weeks back, the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Jammu, joined the wellness brigade with the launch of 'Anandam', a centre for happiness, based on the principles of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to help reduce the mental pressure of students and faculty faced with the stress of deadlines, coursework, teaching-load and professional and personal life challenges.

Ecosystem for bliss

Highlighting the fact that COVID - 19 further posed considerable challenges to students and faculty members, BS Sahay, director, IIM Jammu says, the institute felt the need to create an ecosystem which would enable students to manage their life energies to remain joyful not only as a student but later as managers and executives in various organisations.

"The purpose of 'Anandam: The Centre for Happiness' is to bring holistic well-being based on the notion of 'pañca kosa.' Regular physical exercise or asanas can bring wellness at the physical level (annamaya kośa); breathing exercises like prañayama and mindfulness can help in enhancing vitality (prāṇamaya kosa); meditation (dhyana) and contemplation (nididhyasana) over the nature and purpose of life brings tranquility at the emotional and cognitive level (manomaya & vijñanamaya). When the four sheaths are harmonised, one experiences a profound state of relaxation and bliss (ananda)," Sahay says.

Building bridges and connections

Happiness is also an essential ingredient in curriculums across the IITs with IIT Kharagpur having set up the 'Rekhi Centre of Excellence for the Science of Happiness' as a platform to nurture the science and art of happiness through scientific perspectives across research, academic programme, practice and outreach.

At IIT Madras, several curricular courses have been introduced that “have started to tickle the students’ happiness nerves”, says MS Sivakumar, faculty, Department of Applied Mechanics, IIT Madras. Elective courses such as Happiness, Habits and success, fostering enriching relationships, strategies for professional growth, and discovering creativity have left a positive impact among the students.

Happiness in times of VUCA

At IIM Bodh Gaya, the emphasis is on mindfulness through its centre Samatvam where students under the Pragyam talk series have been enlightened with the practice of becoming mindful leaders, adapting to changing trends, and creating a work-life balance. Core and elective courses on mindfulness, emotional intelligence, mental wellbeing have also been incorporated into the institute’s MBA, PhD and UG curriculum.

Vinita S Sahay, director, IIM Bodh Gaya says that if happiness is the goal, such initiatives should not be seen as a band-aid in special circumstances but built into the education system. “Happiness is a life skill which should be incorporated across institutions, more so in covid times, marked by VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) to make students resilient.”

“The pandemic, it appears, has forced 1.2 billion children in 186 countries out of physical classrooms. In the age of virtual classes where students are relying on self and parental help, the Happiness curriculum is a necessity to foster creativity,” says Nitin Arora, professor, Amity University that has set up the Amity Centre of Happiness which recently conducted ‘Legendary happiness: Research Conference’ and another on ‘Student Engagement, well-being, holistic development and the New Normal’ to familiarise students with the key pillars of happiness.

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