How To Make A Fairytale Come True

Let's look at the life of an average Class XII student. In Class XII, she prepares for the toughest school examination of her life. At the same time, she keeps a track of admission tests for technical and professional programmes, along with university admissions.

After the boards get over—a new series of tests begin. For students not living in the metros, this means travelling to a centre in the city. In between, there is the hunt for accommodation—an expensive affair. If tests happen to be on consecutive days, students either have to fly between cities, or let go of an option. Once results are out and universities start offering admissions just to be safe (Indians love to be safe!), fee deposits are made in one university, and then the wait for the "right" university starts. When the dream offer arrives, then its a rush to get admission there, and then try to get a refund from the first place. Consider an alternative scenario. A single entrance examination—one that applies to all universities—that, too, online. A single portal that offers the admission details of all universities. During admission, the fee is deposited online. If a student gets through more than one university then a fee transfer system is also in place. It may seem like the higher education fairy tale—but implementation might just be simple.

India Specific Problems

When it started, the All India Engineering Entrance Examination (AIEEE) was supposed to reduce the number of admission tests of engineering programmes in the country. But, the AIEEE did not have its desired impact.

The reason: universities in India give weight to different subjects. There is also a financial angle. Admission is an expensive operation and the process of advertising is not cheap. Conducting one's own examination allows universities to charge higher application fees, and take care of expenses related to the process. Academicians have also argued that having a single exam causes too much stress—a single day's performance affects all future career options. The above arguments all hold weight—thus, is there a model common entrance examination that takes care of all these concerns? There is indeed a simple solution.

An ideal examination could, or should, have multiple sections. Students can choose to appear in some, or all, of those sections. Consider the admissions to engineering programmes. Most universities want to test students on physics, chemistry, and mathematics. So, exams could have all three sections. Some universities also put stress on language skills, aptitude, analytical skills, etc. Therefore, examinations could also have sections on those. Results should provide individual marks in sections, and each university can choose to consider a weighted average of marks obtained in some of the sections.

Ideally, there should be a computer-based examination (like the GRE) and questions should not be random from a large database. Difficulty-level of questions should depend on

the performance of a student in previous sections. If a student keeps answering all questions, then the computer will ask progressively difficult questions. Such an exam ensures that the student with a high score has not just performed better than others, but has answered more difficult questions correctly.

Looking for Solutions

Stress associated with single exam can be solved by offering multiple attempts. The best score may be retained. This, of course, is easier said than done. Exam logistics would be such that it would not be possible to provide other opportunity days. The time between board exams and the beginning of the admission process is short. So, it will certainly not be possible to permit three attempts if the exam has to be held during this period. The solution is that students be permitted to take the exam prior to the boards. Since most will want a significant gap between admission and board exams, the admission test has to be at the beginning of Class XII—which means that the test should ideally omit the syllabus of Class XII.

great opportunity to create such a test, and bring together a set of universities who believe in it.

The second problem related to admission is filling up forms of universities and running around to deposit fees and certificate submission when an admission offer is made. Technology has simple solutions for this too. Again, it translates into a great business opportunity. One can come up with a web portal—a student can apply to multiple universities by providing information once. It can then select the universities in which one is interested. If a particular university needs additional information, that can be provided. The portal should have a link for online payment, charging the student whatever is the application fee and a small overhead to cover its cost. The portal ideally should have links to the result websites of all tests—one that may be downloaded when results are announced. Universities should be able to mention the mechanism by which a merit list is to be created. The portal will create the unique merit list for each university based on the admission criterion.

Students should be able to put in information about all programmes in universities that they are

Admission is a costly task, ads are not cheap. Conducting one's examination allows a varsity to take care of expenses

Overseas, there are tests before Class XII finals—if one performs well in it and passes the board exam at the end of Class XII, it is assumed that the student knows the subject to the extent that she or he can understand the material taught in the first year of college. Having the admission test in the beginning of Cass XII will also ensure that the admissions need not be squeezed in a small time (between June and July) every year. In fact, universities can offer admission tests much before the board exams, reducing stress for students.

The Ticket to the Portal

The financial incentive to conduct one's own exam is easy to handle. Universities can charge an appropriate application fee to mitigate their advertising and related costs. They can also charge an admission fee from those who accept the offer for admission. For companies in the testing business, it is a

interested in, and the order of preference of those programmes, just like what they do in joint counseling of IITs or for NITs. The portal operator can also have help centres in cities to help students from rural backgrounds in entering all relevant information. It can also provide help to universities for the verification of documents. Once results are available, universities can start offering admissions through the portal that can provide support in terms of forwarding emails and SMSes, or posting letters and documents. The portal will ensure that as soon as an admission offer is made to a student, the lower options of the student are removed from the system. If the student had earlier accepted another offer by paying the required fee, that admission is cancelled and money is transferred towards payment of fees for the new programme. Universities may have policies on refund, which will come into play and will be implemented by the portal as well. ◄EDU

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