



## Great Lakes Institute of Management to augment digital transformation with AI, AR and VR

The Covid-19 crisis has acted as a catalyst for digital transformation initiatives in the higher education sector. In an interview with Express Computer, Dr. Suresh Ramanathan, Dean, Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai, shares more about the IT infrastructure at the institution and what are the new digital focus areas



### **How is the focus on IT and digital implementations and practices at Great Lakes?**

Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai, is a globally accredited institution and ranks consistently among India's top 10 b-schools. The entire campus is well connected with high speed Wi-Fi and students can access the school's facilities such as learning management system (LMS) and library digitally from anywhere on the campus at any time.

Our digital implementation rides on an end-to-end ERP system which ensures that students have a seamless experience from entry into the programme to exit upon graduation, covering all processes in the life cycle.

Great Lakes is also one of only four business schools to be chosen by Niti Aayog and the Atal Innovation Mission to host an incubator on campus. The Atal Innovation Mission Great Lakes Balachandran Incubator (AGBI) hosts a state of the art facility including an artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) lab with 35 high-end computers equipped with all the requisite software, and a Tinkering Lab with 3D printers. It also hosts a multi-media studio with capabilities for augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality.

### **Which new IT / digital implementations at Great Lakes have led to excellence in learning processes for students?**

We have a cloud-based digital solution implemented at Great Lakes with a footprint that covers the entire student experience:

- Hosting content, question banks, e-books
- (As a) Communication portal
- For curricular and co-curricular communities
- Internal assessments and feedback
- Anywhere, anytime learning
- Faculty training and collaboration

This provides our students an immersive learning experience.

### **How can higher education institutions leverage technology for dealing with unprecedented situations like Covid-19?**

Given that a crisis like Covid-19 necessitates remote learning, the challenge before institutions of higher learning is to create a highly engaging learning experience for students. It is quite clear that institutions that simply conduct classes in the online mode the same way as they did in the classroom will be missing a trick. Technology can help not only deliver better value to students online by creating greater opportunities for interactivity, but also provide opportunities to customise value based on learning rates and needs. In other words, a one size fits all approach that is the norm for large classroom formats can be transformed by the use of the technology to deliver more personalised content.

One example of how we have used technology to our advantage during the present crisis is our unique 'Term Zero' experience created for our incoming students who were supposed to join in May, but have had to wait to start their programme at Great Lakes. We leveraged our global network and connections to host distinguished thought leaders from top business schools such as Harvard, Stanford, Chicago Booth, Kellogg, NYU, Yale, and IIT Chicago in high-impact interactions with our students. We also had several CXOs share their perspectives with the students. Further, we are providing our students a series of masterclasses and workshops, team building exercises, and certifications in business analytics. We are thus transforming higher education by using technology to go beyond simple classroom lectures to providing a range of value-added activities.

At the same time, there are significant challenges to be overcome with respect to recreating the classroom experience. The true value of that experience does not merely rest in the quality of faculty teaching, but rather in being together with one's classmates during a class session, actively participating and learning from one another. There is no substitute for the

intimacy of an in-class learning experience. Further, there are challenges in assessing performance, with only some formats of exams being amenable to online assessment. Despite the availability of online proctoring and AI-based systems, there is not much confidence in the effectiveness of such tools.

**Which, according to you, are the emerging technologies that will make a significant difference in the education sector in the future?**

Perhaps the biggest impact through technology will be created by the use of adaptive learning to customise education based on learning rates, needs, and behaviours. I see large classroom formats giving way to more intimate settings with deeper forays into the material by stimulating learning through customized content. While AR and VR will add value to the experience, I believe that this value will not be as high as that which can be created by customisation. The ideal use of technology will be to create a sense of flow, whereby students feel cognitively immersed in the experience.

**How are you collaborating with industry players to ensure skill development in emerging technologies among students?**

We are lucky to partner with several leading industry players to develop a curriculum that is truly cutting edge in terms of exposure to emerging technologies. As the country's pre-eminent business school in the area of analytics, we occupy a rarefied space in being one of the very few business schools to offer a complete major in AL, ML, algorithmic analytics, and blockchain. These technologies form the backbone for almost all the cutting edge applications being used in industry today and planned for the future. The curriculum is revised periodically in consultation with our industry partners to ensure that skills are always up to date.

**What's your take on the 'Blended Learning' approach, which is much discussed in the present times?**

In my opinion, there is blended learning, and then there is 'blended learning'. Not all blended learning is effective. In order for it to be truly effective, it must leverage the strengths of both modes of delivery, namely in-class and online, and deliver a truly engaging experience that challenges students, promotes deep thinking, and creates a seamless omnichannel experience for students. The parallel to this is the challenge faced by retailers navigating an environment where customers are adept at switching back and forth between a brick and mortar store and the online store. Every interaction with the customer regardless of where it occurs needs to be leveraged to the fullest in order to ensure that the customer does not face a drop-off in quality when switching. Similarly, there needs to be seamless integration between the classroom and the online interaction.

**Are there any new projects / tech implementations you are looking at in the next few years?**

We are actively looking at AI-based technologies coupled with virtual reality and augmented reality software. We will also be investing in digital process transformation to enable agile workplaces and support services.

Link: <https://www.expresscomputer.in/industries/education/great-lakes-institute-of-management-to-augment-digital-transformation-with-ai-ar-and-vr/58640/>