

Title: **Gender no bar**

Source: Ahmedabad Mirror

Date: 07/06/2015

GENDER NO BAR

IIT Gandhinagar will allow male and female students to live under one dorm roof as it wants to treat them like the adults they are, and learn to become responsible for decisions they make



IIT-Gn has introduced the new room allocation system as students get ready to shift to new hostel blocks in Palej

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To 'modernise' education, colleges and institutes readily adapt trends practised by the West. However, they tend to be orthodox when it comes to living arrangements for students by imposing hostel curfews and restriction of visits to curb interaction with the opposite sex. Breaking free of the traditional mindset, Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar (IIT-Gn) has decided to introduce gender-neutral housing, which allows male and female students to live under one dorm roof.

IIT-Gn has introduced a new room allocation system as students get ready to shift to new hostel blocks in Palej. Students will not only have freedom to visit any hostel they want,

they are also at liberty to choose the hostel block they wish to live in. IIT-Gn Dean (students) Jaison Manjaly said, "We have six hostel blocks on the new campus. One of them has been reserved for girls while the rest will accommodate boys. Though, if a girl is not keen on occupying a room in the girls-only block, she can opt for a room in one of the other blocks."

The girls and boys will stay in separate rooms but share the same mess, common TV room and study halls.

Explaining the reason for this move, he said, "All our students are adults. Rather than imposing restrictions on them, we want to teach

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IIT-Gn offers co-ed living to students



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them to make the right choices and be responsible for those decisions."

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Ankita Joshi, a second year BTech student, believes this is a great idea. "Most people are conservative in their outlook. Restrictions can never help students broaden their horizon and propagate a healthy environment where there is respect for other genders. Initially, students might find it awkward living next to each other but eventually they will get comfortable with the system," she said.

Though the system is relatively new for India, Ankita does not mind living in co-ed hostels. "It helps boys and girls to interact better, boost confidence and get over the traditional perceptions and notions about the opposite gender," the 20-year-old added.

Third year BTech student Prerna Singh believes there should be only one or two

blocks earmarked as co-ed dorms. "It is fine if the system is implemented for married students as they need to be together. I have no issues with gender-neutral hostels but I do not think the guys will be able to have 'carefree' fun if there are girls living in the same block," the 21-year-old said.

However, Varun Agarwal, a second year BTech student, disagrees. "It won't be very different from our current system where boys or girls can visit each other's hostel up to 10 pm. The new system reflects that IIT-Gn is treating us as adults. It believes that we are responsible for whatever we do."

IIT-Gn is not the only institute here that has co-ed hostels. Mica—a premier mass-communications institute in Shilaj—offers gender-neutral living for second year students of Post-Graduate Diploma in Management, Communications.

There are 10 hostels on campus. "As the institute does not have 50-50 ratio for girls and boys, we cannot designate five blocks for girls and the rest for boys. Sometimes, we have to put them in the same hostel block," said a Mica official.

Varsha Dinesh, a PGDMC student, said, "We are a diverse group at Mica. We are allotted hostel rooms in the first year. In the course of the year, we form friendships that spans hostels and genders. This makes life at Mica incredibly fun. Given the opportunity to choose our hostel rooms in the second year, irrespective of gender or any other parameter, we get a chance to be with the 'family' we made in the first year. This strengthens the group's identity and is one more thing that unites friends. We like that the institute trusts us to act as responsible adults and lets us make our senior year as memorable as it can be."

Registrar Sethu Iyer said, "Almost 40 per cent of our students have work experience. Some have been staying in paying guest accommodations and adjust easily. The students are mature enough to co-exist peacefully. Our institute has a strong anti-harassment committee in place. Our student council is also capable of handling concerns that may arise out of this living arrangement. These are reasons why parents are assured that their daughters are safe here."