A

GCT

story

Prasanna Pavani

Good Morning! I'm very happy to be back in GCT today. Before I begin, I have a few questions.

How many of you want to pursue higher education after GCT?
How many of you do not want to or have concerns about pursuing higher education after GCT?

I am not going to ask "How many of you want to get placed?". I already know the answer.

Today, I am going to share my story. Importantly, I'm going to share the lessons I have learned along the way. Let's get started.

1st Yr.
('00)

Like many of you, my first year at GCT was also my first time away from home. I found myself in a new city with new people from places I have never been to. As if that wasn't enough, we were expected to excel in a class full of former school toppers. All of us struggled.

Over time, what was once new became our new normal. In this new normal, we all had learnt to wash clothes, sweep floors, and prepare for unit tests, all in one day.

Live independently!

Prasanna Pavani

In other words, we had learned to live independently. Independence gives you the freedom to chase your dreams.

2nd Yr. ('01)

Our second year was more enjoyable than the first. Coimbatore wasn't a new city any longer. And the mess food was more tolerable. Not that it became any more delicious. We just knew what to expect.

Make friends!

Prasanna Pavani

Make a lot of friends. Your seniors, peers, and juniors are the most valuable connections GCT has to offer you. The easiest way to become friends with someone is to help them when they are in need.

3rd Yr. ('02)

Things started getting more serious from our third year. This photo from a trip to Ooty does not quite reflect the gravity of the situation. We realized that over 50% of our time in GCT is over. We had to think about what we wanted to do after graduation.

All of us prepared for placements. Some of us started preparing for higher education. This really meant doing justice to assignments, unit tests, semester exams, department symposiums, culturals, paper presentations, placement aptitude tests, coding tests, projects, panel discussions, GRE, TOEFL, GMAT, and CAT. Not to forget, washing clothes and sweeping floors. How is one human being supposed to do so much?

Prioritize tasks!

Prasanna Pavani

We learned to prioritize tasks, focus on important ones, and get them done.
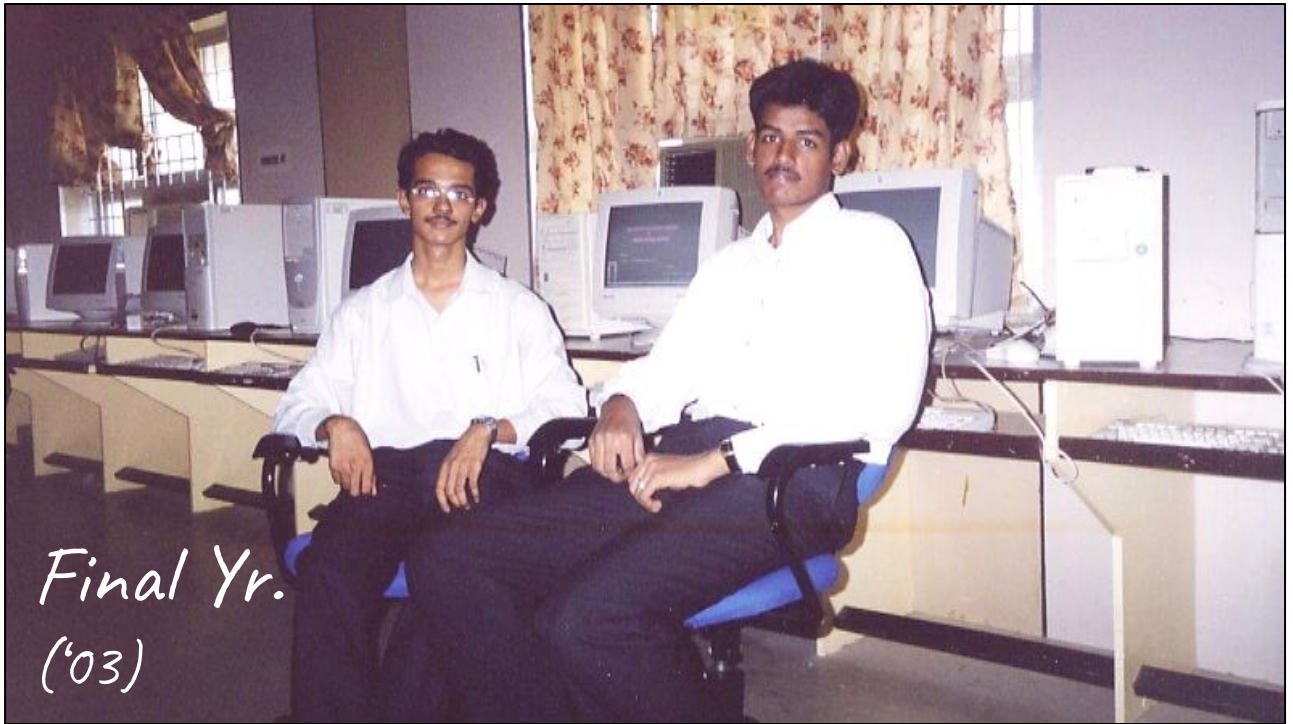
Final Yr.
('03)

Final year was the favorite of our four years at GCT. Mainly because of our final year project. This was our opportunity to identify our true interests, set audacious goals, and accomplish something that we will be proud of for the rest of our lives. Final projects are truly special. If you do well, it can double as a candidate for paper presentation. And if you do well in paper presentation, you will know so much about your project to work on a research publication in an international journal. You will also get good marks, travel experience, and may be some extra pocket money when you win paper presentations. There are very few things in life where one stone gets you so many mangoes.

Set audacious goals!

Prasanna Pavani

Learn to set audacious goals for yourself. This will be crucial later on in life, when you no longer have exams to motivate you.

B.E. graduation ('03)

Occasionally, you will have events to celebrate. Such as placements and graduation.

Be grateful in success!

Prasanna Pavani

Be grateful when you have something to celebrate. When you are grateful, you become humble. And when you are humble, you can learn quicker. The ability to learn quickly is a leading indicator for success.

D. E. Shaw
('04-'05)

Sooner or later, you will realize that you are surrounded by people that are smarter than you in one or more skills. Do not be afraid.

Learn from

peers and juniors!

Prasanna Pavani

Masters ('06)

I took the GRE twice and applied to 3 universities while I was at GCT. I was fortunate to get two admits, but got no scholarships. I felt terrible for wasting my family's hard earned money on university applications. A year later, I wrote the GRE again for the third time and applied to 14 universities. This time, I didn't feel so bad because it was my own money. Luckily, this time around I got two funded admits and received my masters soon after.

Be defiant in failures!

Prasanna Pavani

A wise person once said, "Life's battles don't always go to the stronger or faster one. But sooner or later, the one who wins is the one who *thinks* they can".

Train your mind to *think* you can. In particular, how would you believe in yourself when you fail?

The answer is defiance. Remember your accomplishments. You are among the finest students this state has ever produced. Remembering this will give you the confidence to thoughtfully reflect on the events that caused the failure and use them as a stepping stone for success.

PhD
('09)
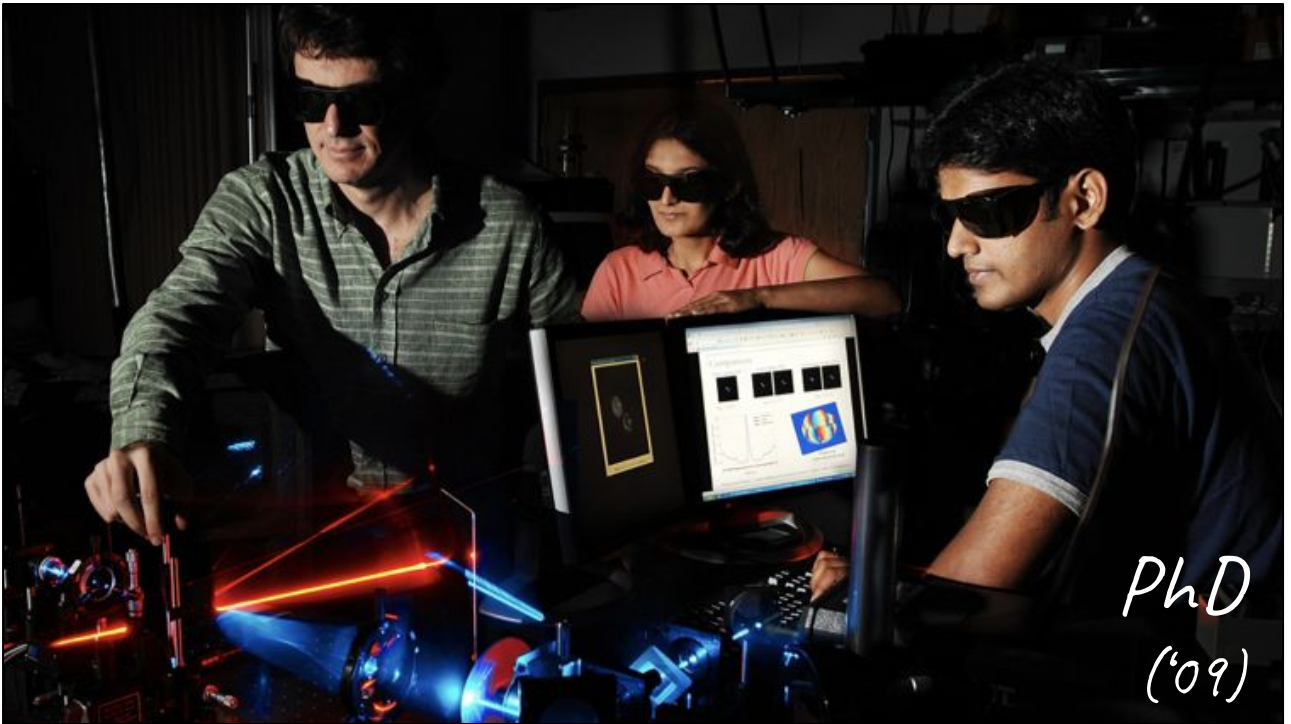
One of the hardest things in PhD is that you are expected to do original research. This means, you invest several years on solving one problem. Unlike B.E. or MS, there is no clearly defined end game. What if you realize the problem is unsolvable after 5 years? Even worse, what if someone else solves the problem after you have spent years on it?

After a while into my PhD, I learned that there are two kinds of research problems. The easy ones and hard ones. Easy ones are often incremental additions to other people's work. They will get you a few publications and a degree. Unfortunately, not many care about such research. The hard problems fall in the high-risk high-reward category. Your research can be very frustrating. But if it succeeds, it will be a spectacular advance in engineering.

I learned to choose hard problems. The possibility of a spectacular outcome was enough motivation to overcome the risk of failure.

Embrace uncertainty!

Prasanna Pavani

Life is very much like PhD research. If you want to make it big, you have to make huge bets. And that means, embracing uncertainty. The good news is that history forgets failures and remembers successes. So, really, there is no reason not to make huge bets.

Tech. Industry
('10 - '19)

Just to complete my story, I have been working in the tech industry since my PhD, where I am fortunate to work with some of the smartest people in the planet.

Create your

GCT

story

Prasanna Pavani

It's now time to get to my final lesson for you. Whether we like it or not, all of us in this room today are authors of our own story books. Why not create one heck of a story for ourselves?

Thank you!