

Learning Environment at The IHS

- ✓ Expect a different than a usual environment here. For example, You have to come prepared with assigned readings for the class. In other words you have to read, understand even before the lesson is taught to you in the class. Actually the classes here are used more to clarify doubts and clear concepts than to teach you.
- ✓ Expect dirtied hands and soiled clothes all in the game of hands on learning.



CHISA 2000 students assembling a Personal Computer



A skill is based both on knowledge - what to do - and on behaviour - how to do it - and often requires practice and thoughtful reflection to develop. The learning environment in the IHS provides opportunity for reflection, model building, concrete experience, as well as trial-and-error learning. The aim is to make students self-renewing and self-directed. Opportunity for a variety of learning modes allow students to access these according to their own preferred learning styles. Students are encouraged to expand their learning style repertoire, by exposing each of them to the full range of learning modes.



Textbooks

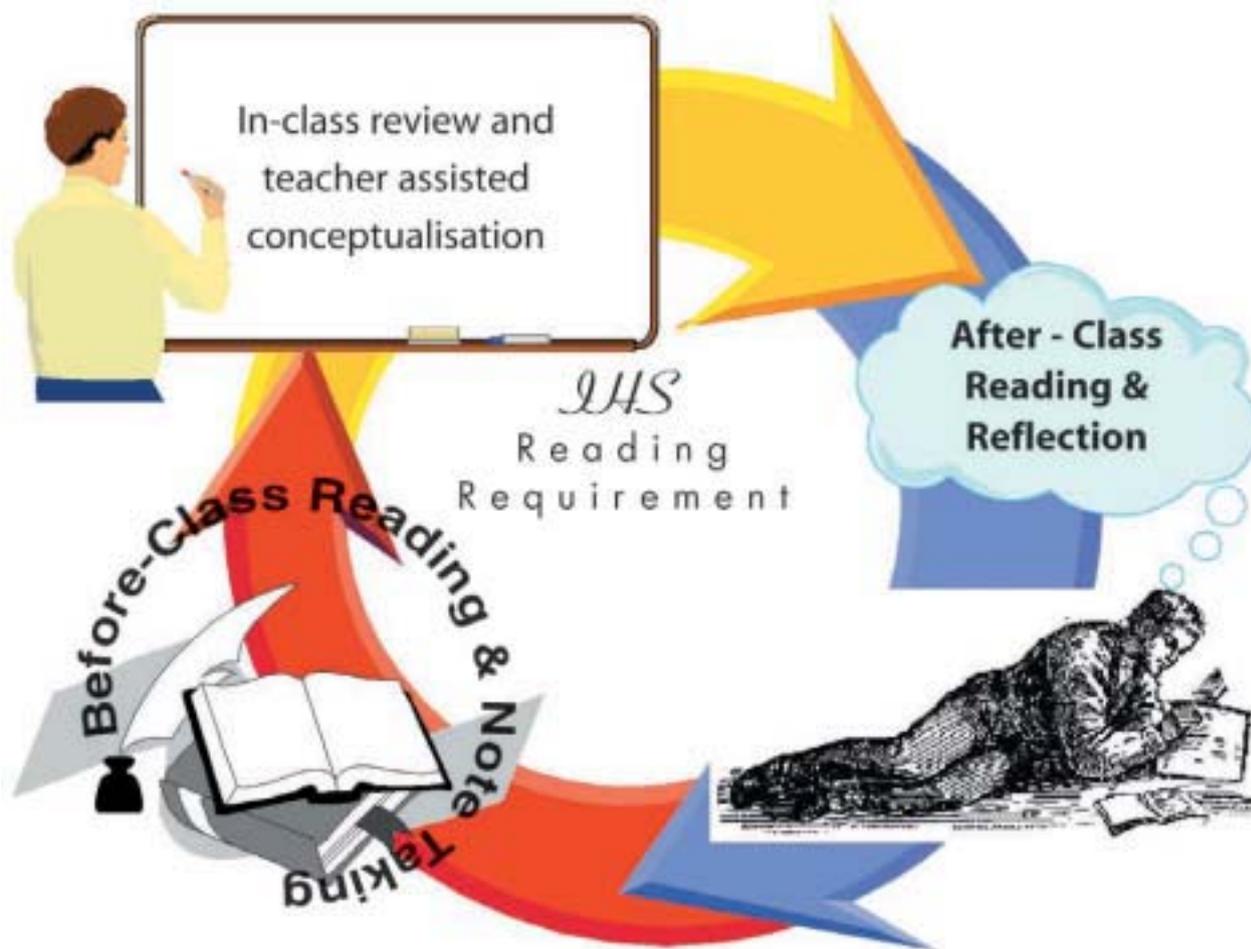
Textbooks play an important role in student learning. Textbooks are carefully selected in order to make clear connections among health system concepts. They would cover a variety of examples and case studies that exhibit, reinforce, and extend students problem-solving skills. Frequently encountered situations and events are dealt to demonstrate problem-solving techniques and to provide



opportunities for students to use those techniques as they progress through the textbook. Selected textbooks emphasize the learning of theoretical concepts and their applications. Textbooks giving many application oriented problems or appropriate use of technology are preferred. Text books are selected on the merits and characteristics of the text, while keeping cost considerations in mind.

Reading Requirement

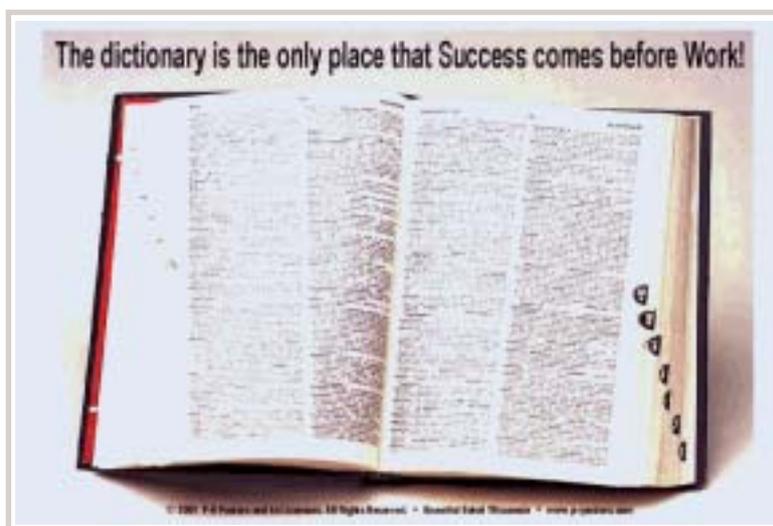
Reading requirement for courses at the IHS are fairly demanding. Readings are assigned from the textbooks, and where necessary, additional sources, to allow for reflection and model building. Students are required to go through the assigned reading before the class and make notes on points they did not fully understand. Theory, demonstration and lecture sessions are designed to highlight important concepts and not necessarily reproduce the textbook material. These classes will lay emphasis on clarification of doubts and will illustrate the concepts covered in the text. The student is expected to review the assigned reading after the class. Thus the learning environment is designed to encourage each student to traverse the subject matter at least three times; first unaided reading by the student, second, review of the material with assistance of the teacher in the class, and thirdly after-class reading and reflection.





Dictionary Around Every Where!

The Institute recognises the importance of language skills in learning and comprehension. Development of language skills is a continuing process. To facilitate continued development of language skills, most courses at the Institute include sessions on spoken English, development of writing skills, seminar sessions to develop language and presentation skills.



Most important is the ubiquitous dictionary every where around in the IHS. There are dictionaries lying around in lounges, in class rooms, and of course, many in the library. Every student is required to have his / her personal dictionary, one on the bed side and one to carry in the pocket!

Experiential Atmosphere

Structured practical sessions allow students to gain concrete experience. These sessions guide the student through a sequence of tasks, to achieve a preset goal. Problem solving practical sessions are designed to encourage some structured problem solving strategies as well as trial-and-error learning. Here the student is given a problem and asked to solve it, some how. Thus the student has the choice to select what ever problem solving strategy (s)he is comfortable with and work towards the problem solving goal.



Faculty familiarising students with the mother board while they start to assemble a Personal Computer

The Institute strives to create practical sessions in every course. This obsession with practical may some times give rise to uncanny situations. For example, the mathematics course in the advanced studies in public health (APH) program, organised a “Number La/unch” to let the students experience Russel’s number theory. Students learnt the concept of sets, a set of sets through sets of 3s and 4s made up of a variety of materials. Incidentally some of these collections had eatables justifying the lunch that followed.

Number L^a/unch

Students in the same course physically measured the staircase and ramps in HACA Bhavan to experience the concept of slope and estimate the same.

A network bridge role play was organised for students of CHISA 2001 batch. Each student was assigned to constitute different network components connected to each other through holes cut through partitions. Students in different component area could interact through network packets (paper slips) but could not talk. The group had to play till they completed mapping the IP address of all computers and correctly found the segments to which they belong.



Lounge-around and Slave-overs!

The Institute endeavours to tailor its scheduling policy to meet student learning needs. On average classes are longer in duration, usually about 90 minutes and upto two hours. Longer sessions allow faculty to pace the class according to student needs. Students are able to focus on a topic for longer duration, instead of shifting through many topics in a day. After-lunch session is more likely to be a practical or filled with activities and less likely to be a lecture. Deliberately inserted break periods allow student groups to discuss in the Institute’s large lobbies, and long corridors, with maps and dictionaries standing by. Cabins for group discussions are available on priori booking. You might simply lounge around and refresh yourself for the next class! The Institute’s campus is open round-the-clock. Students can access learning resources beyond school hours. The security will let students in, any time of the day, all days of the week. Almost every student finds some problem interesting enough or simply hard to crack. So you find people working at a problem very hard, usually late evenings. We call these the slave-overs. Some times slave-overs may end up in sleep-overs giving rise to student activities early in the morning!





Field Trips and Study Tours:

Most academic programs at the Institute allocate time for field trips, visits to functioning institutions, facilities, field placements and / or study tours to let students see things for themselves. For example, students in Health Informatics programs visit hospitals, operation theatres, diagnostic laboratories, to observe and understand them, as they work. The Advance studies in Public Health students have to

complete at least one field placement in a Health Care or Research Institution and another period of field placement or study tour. Participants in short duration training programs do also get to see a few things. For example, ICMR scientists attending a research methodology course visited the Director Census Operations office to meet people who gather various demographic and mortality statistics and interacted with the sales people distributing statistical publications by the Registrar General of India.

Dig Deep and Seek

Students are encouraged to pick up a topic, look at it thoroughly and from all perspectives. Deep processing of concepts and transformative learning is encouraged to let students cultivate their generative processing capacity. Students are introduced to landmark articles in the history of development of the concepts under study. They are encouraged to dig deep into the bibliography of the topic in hand and seek out the original source of concepts.

This process is reinforced by the Institute's practice of inviting living legends and practitioners to lecture at the Institute and interact with its academic community.



Discourses on abstract concepts and theories have a tendency to 'go heavy' and may leave a student behind pondering and overawed. Case studies and narratives help students refocus and visualise application of theory in real life situations. Courses designed at the Institute require a balanced presentation of theory and illustration with case studies. Story telling, and narratives are used profusely to illustrate

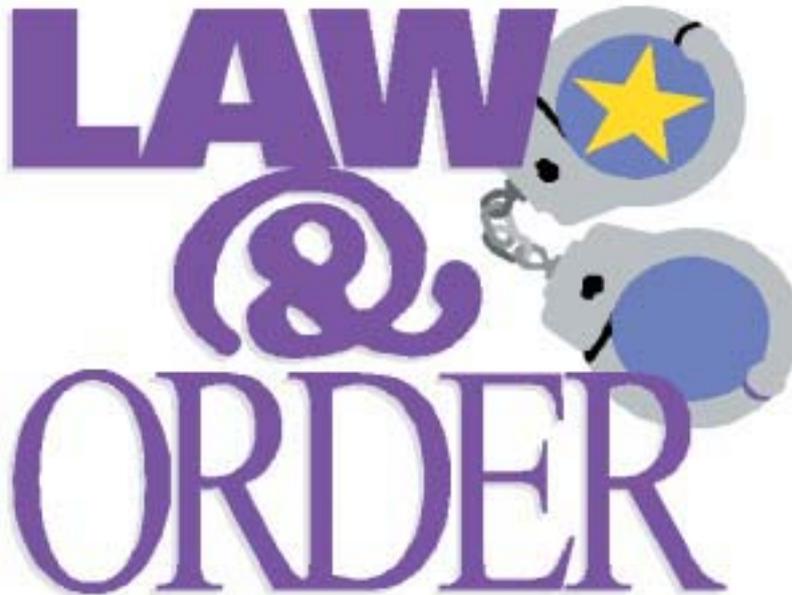
concepts and their application. Faculties are encouraged to build up their stock of stories and connect with their own real life experiences.

Kavitha's "One-rupee" rule!

Kavitha is the Institute's librarian. The Library is one of the most comfortable places in the Institute. It is air conditioned. Book stacks are open to let readers pick up a book of interest as they spot it. The library collection is modest. But there are things that you would not get in any other library in Hyderabad. And there are yet some things that may not be readily available elsewhere in the country. The IHS Library collection includes books on public health, epidemiology, demography, health and social behaviour, statistics, mathematics, health economics, health informatics, computer hardware, computer software development, research methodology, management, organisation behaviour etc. A few journals are regularly subscribed. Holdings include CD ROMs, Video and Audio cassettes. This is a good place for learning and a comfortable place to read.

But there is Kavitha's one-rupee rule!

If you are spotted by her to be gossiping, chit chatting or in a group discussion inside the library, then she raises a one rupee charge on each person noticed by her. She does this silently. You would notice it in your term bill. All library users, including faculty and staff are subject to the one-rupee rule. Unfortunately this is one area of the Institute's administration where no appeal lies anywhere. The librarian's decision is binding. However, interestingly, Kavitha is yet to raise any revenue! No collection, despite her omnibus powers! People have simply been minding their studies in the library. The Institute encourages students to enjoy the comfort and exploit resources in the library.



Faculty Evaluation:

A key feature of the Institute's learning environment is that students and faculty evaluate each other. Faculty evaluate students to help guide them in their skill development. Student evaluation of faculty helps the latter to better prepare for the class and meet student expectations. People in the Institute view life as a continuous learning process. Instructors and faculty strive to better themselves. Student evaluation and feedback to faculty helps in this process. Student feedback is obtained through a variety of means such as; end of the week session wise faculty evaluation, informal meetings between students and course coordinator, training services officer, and periodical meetings with the Director. In addition to the classes taken by the full time instructors, some classes may be taken by the guest / visiting faculty. Faculty evaluation forms are administered at the end of the week. Students judge overall effectiveness and assess seven specific dimensions of faculty style and teaching impact. A five point; poor, satisfactory, good, very good, and outstanding; rating scale is used. Evaluation form is administered by program office, without any faculty presence. Direct or indirect

solicitation of any kind of desired feedback by or on behalf of any faculty is viewed seriously. Students are expected to give their candid and considered response. Strategic or collusive feedback / response by students may be a ground for administrative withdrawal from a course or modification of academic credentials granted by the Institute. At the end of the course, students are requested to evaluate overall course experience and critically comment about various aspects. The Institute uses the feedback to further improve the course.

Notes and Reference:

The above description is based on practices developed at the Institute. These are the actual experience of faculty and students. Things, as they are. We are reassured and heartened with the knowledge that the practices at the IHS are consistent with contemporary theory of human learning and best pedagogic practices. Accordingly, we have benefited from expressions and terminology used by various authorities, in preparing the above description. Those that, we are consciously aware of, are listed below.

- 1 Our description of textbook policy at the IHS has benefited from the language used by the American Mathematical Association. Available at <http://www.amatyc.org/PositionPapers/Textbooks.html>
- 2 The section title "A Mind at a Time..." is inspired by Mel Levine, *A Mind at a Time*. New York: Simon & Schuster; 2002.
- 3 Some of the pictures used above have been downloaded from <http://www.print-a-poster.com/> These are; (a) RESPECT: The secret in education..., and (b) The dictionary is the only place...

A Mind at a Time - Every Student Matters:

Our conviction is that every student has distinct educational needs. Our goal is to produce a diversified assortment of human beings, reinforcing personal strengths and affinities. Hence every student is followed up by the respective program office as a separate person. Progress by students is monitored through, home work assignments, class participation, overall effort, mid and end term examinations. The course coordinator, and faculties regularly review attendance, class participation, reading habit, and overall progress, towards the learning goals, by each student. One-on-one meetings with the course coordinator, and where necessary the Director, is arranged to understand each student's situation, specific learning requirement. These interactions seek to motivate each student to realise his / her full potential. The IHS sets achievable goals for students, and has designed the required processes to fulfil them. Both process indicators and educational outcome indicators are used to monitor and evaluate each teaching program. Make-up classes, and repeat practical is arranged for small groups or even individual students, to ensure that all students have achieved the designed level of understanding, have learnt required skills, and are keeping pace with each other. Some times, the entire class may repeat a topic and redo a practical, to satisfy designed levels of skill development. Thus the Institute's emphasis is on outcome rather than the process.

Notes and Reference (Contd...)

4. The paragraph immediately preceding the section on textbook, has borrowed expressions (a) about nature of skills from Guirdham Maureen; Tyler Katherine. *Enterprise Skills for Students*, Butterworth. Heinemann, and (b) on learning environment and learning styles from description by Goleman and others, of David Kolb's Work on learning styles. Goleman Daniel; Boyatzis Richard; Mckee Annie. *The New Leaders. Transforming the art of leadership into the science of results*. London: Little Brown; 2002, p150-152.
5. Some of the expressions under "dig deep and seek the source" are based on the review article by David Robotham, "The application of learning style theory in higher education teaching" available at <http://www.chelt.ac.uk/gdn/discuss/index.htm>

What the IHS students and alumni say and how they felt!

"Today I am here because of the support and encouragement by IHS. The faculty of IHS helped me a lot by putting all their efforts and experiences while teaching. Especially by explaining troubleshooting scenarios, which they had faced in real time environment. The internship offered by this institute for me in West Godavari District has exposed me in system administration in real time. About the training in IHS I am pretty confident that this institute will give a right push up in the market with sound knowledge."

Mr. M. Sreekanth (CHISA-1999), System Administrator, MCH, Hyderabad

"This institute has given me a great opportunity to learn in real environment. This institute has given me a lot of resources like Library facility and 24 hours Lab facility. I did not find this type of environment in any institute. That's why I have learned, I have gained invaluable experience through this institute. So I suggest all of the students to utilise the resources provided by this institute and be successful in your future."

Mr. Phani Kumar (CHISA-2001), System Administrator, Sagarlal Memorial Hospital, Hyd.

"This course is unlike other courses which just provide theoretical knowledge and sends us into the world but here we not only learn things practically in the course but even after the course, during internship we are exposed to many problems which system administrators face in the real world."

Mr. A.G. Srikanth (CHISA-2002), System Administrator, Commissioner of Coop. Societies, Hyd.

"The faculty here take a lot of personal care. I some times feel that the faculties read more than us, they work harder than us, just to teach a session of 2 hours."

Mr. Ajay Tripathy, APH 2003 Student

