

Azim Premji University Student Reflection

Rahul Hemrajani is currently pursuing his LL.M. in Law and Development from Azim Premji University. He has graduated from Symbiosis Law School, Pune with a Bachelor's Degree in Law. Previously, he worked as an Associate at Lakshmikumaran and Sridharan, a law firm. We caught up with Rahul for a candid conversation. He shares his experiences here at Azim Premji University.



Q1. What motivations/objectives did you have while applying for the LL.M in Law and Development programme at Azim Premji University?

I had realized quite early in my career that I wanted to join academia, and was looking for good masters programmes in law. I chose Azim Premji University over other programs primarily because of its faculty. The School of Policy and Governance at Azim Premji University has some of the most eminent scholars of public law in India and the master's programme I thought would be a wonderful opportunity to learn from leaders in the field. Another reason for applying to the programme was the reputation of Azim Premji University as a conducive academic environment for open and free exchange of ideas. Azim Premji University classes seemed to me to be remarkable melting pots, where students of different backgrounds and viewpoints could engage in respectful and productive debate.

Q2. Could you tell us about your journey pursuing this programme?

The one year in Azim Premji University has been a demanding but enriching experience. Classes in Azim Premji University did not follow the teacher-student lecture model that I was used to in my undergraduation . The classroom seminars were dedicated to critically engage and debate with the major readings in the field. In each class, I was encouraged to engage with

the issue and offer my own perspective. Each class is thus a discussion, where the class as a whole breaks-down and analyses a topic. Due to this pedagogical approach, I had a rich learning experience in all six of my classes in this one year. I particularly enjoyed the class on The Philosophical Foundations of Political Institutions by Prof. Nigam Nuggehalli, as it forced me to go outside my comfort zone as a lawyer and think about legal problems in the abstract.

Another highlight of the year was the field engagement component of the course, where our mixed-discipline team was expected to go out of the classroom and engage with society to develop meaningful interventions. This year-long project was an extremely rewarding experience, where, with my peers from other programs in the University, we engaged in the problem of transparency and accountability in judicial institutions. Our team this year published an important report on the RTI and the courts, which was covered by the legal press and appreciated by RTI activists.

Q3. To what extent the interdisciplinary nature of the programme helped you equip yourself with sufficient skills and competencies?

The law-school curriculum in my undergraduation was oriented towards equipping us with the requisite legal "skills", rather than the requisite legal "knowledge". The advantage with Azim Premji University is that each course looks at the interactions between multiple disciplines. Unlike law schools which teach subjects such as "criminal law" or "constitutional law", we got to study subjects such as "law and justice" and "law and social transformation". For the first time, I got to study "law" as it is applied in society, rather than "law" in our statute books. I realized that as a lawyer, I was being myopic in my understanding of the law. Each discipline has its own lens through which they view the "law". Sitting in a class with educationists, economists and sociologists, I was able to appreciate that legal study has different dimensions, each of which has value. I think this way of thinking about legal problems will be crucial as I enter the world of law teaching and research.

Q4. What is the one highlight of your year in Azim Premji University?

One of the most educative experiences in this one year was the Law and Social Sciences Network conference. The entire LL.M. batch along with the LL.M. faculty attended and participated in the conference. In what were three absorbing days, I attended 12 panels out of a possible 64, dealing with variegated topics such as Gender Identity, Consent, Torture and Court

Statistics. In every panel, young and experienced scholars from different disciplines engaged with legal issues using methods from social science. Senior academics including illustrious names such as Upendra Baxi, Nandini Sundar and Julia Eckert were keen to engage candidly with and critique the papers of researchers who were just starting out. Even outside the formal panels, the panelists were extremely amicable and willing to discuss any issue. For me personally, it was a chance to network with scholars such as Rohit De and Mitra Sharafi in my own niche field of interest, legal history.

Q5. Tell us how this programme can serve as a launching pad for your future career. What are your career plans?

After the program, I plan to join legal academia and teach law. One of the things that colleges and schools look for while hiring professors is original research. The program's dissertation component, which allows you to produce original research under the supervision of the faculty is crucial in this regard. Further, the programme offered assistance in passing the National Eligibility Test- which is a compulsory requirement for college-level teaching in India. In addition, through interacting with the faculty both inside and outside the classroom, I have learned a lot about legal pedagogy and legal education. For me, the programme was extremely helpful as a launching pad for a career in legal academia and legal research.

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