

# Azim Premji University Student Reflection

**Vaishnavi Rathore is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in Public Policy and Governance from Azim Premji University. We caught up with Vaishnavi for a candid conversation. Graduated from St. Stephen's College, Delhi University with a Bachelor's Degree in Economics and Political Science, Vaishnavi shares her experiences here at Azim Premji University.**



***Q: The general trend in Master's is to choose a program related to your Bachelor's. Could you tell us what made you choose M.A in Public Policy and Governance?***

Ever since I made the conscious choice of studying social sciences in 12 standard, I was always looking for ways to move out of theories to practically use this knowledge on the ground to make a difference. With that in mind, I set out for options that would help me do so and discovered the field of public policy. Moreover, Public Policy and Governance seemed to be a perfect amalgamation of economics and political science, two subjects that I had developed an affinity to.

Now, in the last leg of the course, I am pleasantly surprised to discover that this field is an amalgamation of many more disciplines; philosophy, development economics, law, anthropology and even mathematics coexist here beautifully.

***Q: Where did you first hear about Azim Premji University?***

A senior from Stephen's got admission here, and she only had good things to say about the Institution. I then proceeded to reading up on Azim Premji University on their website and decided it seemed like a great opportunity.

***Q: The transition between learning a pure discipline (in UG) to an interdisciplinary programme in your Masters. How was that journey?***

I usually am vary about limiting myself to one field, because most times I can't decide between things! In course of time though, I have realized that this inherent confusion has been good for me. With that, in my graduation I decided to study two disciplines instead of specializing in one, which allowed me to make

inferences between the two disciplines. The transition from under graduation to Masters in Public Policy thus did not feel that drastic. I enjoy being a generalist; I love the fact that in this course I can combine all my interests to come up with something new. For example, I enjoy adventure sports and for my policy analysis class, I used the mechanisms of economics to explain if the decision by National Green Tribunal to ban camping in Rishikesh (where White water Rafting is a popular sport) was a good decision. Just the other day, I was discussing with a friend how the aspect of moral and legal ethics could be found in the movie 'Sanctum' which is about Cave Explorers!

***Q: If you have to look back, do you think you have changed as a person?***

I think my thoughts have become more streamlined and even though I have always been patient, I have learnt to be more accepting other's opinions while contributing mine with confidence. I guess most of this comes from having professors and mentors who patiently listen, and pose counter arguments to our points, that helped me take my stance confidently and make pointed arguments. More than change I think I have become more aware of who I am. In these past two years, I realized that my time management skills are quite good. I also realized that I am capable of coming up with new ideas and have the confidence to execute them. This, of course, comes with making a few mistakes now and then, but all the mistakes, the challenges and successes that I achieved in these two years have made me who I am now.

***Q: Have you opted for a specialization? Where are you Interning this year? What job options are you looking at?***

We do not have the option of specializing in our course, but I have carefully chosen my electives in sync with my interests and where I see myself working. This is broadly in the sector of Water, Sanitation and Environment. In the long run, I would like to enter the field of development journalism, but before that, I want to get my hands dirty on the field for a couple of years. In that regard, I chose to do my winter internship at Down to Earth Magazine, Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi. It was a brilliant experience, where I learnt a lot right from terms like 'embargo' and 'pagination' which journalists use in their daily work and I had no idea of, from writing reports that are a balance between using pretty metaphors and heavy data. The most exciting moments of this internship was when I opened the Magazine one day to find something that I had worked on in the print, under my name.

***Q: Do you think undergrad students in general are aware about inter disciplinary Courses?***

I really don't think that undergrad students are usually aware of inter disciplinary courses. In fact, in Delhi University at least, taking a BA Program (which usually comprises studying two or three core courses) is seen to be less prestigious than

an Honours' course, which is a specialization in one discipline. I personally hold both with the same regard. But what I love about multi-disciplinary course is their ability to bring everything together—the beautiful combination of Mathematics and Philosophy, of Literature and Anthropology, of Psychology and Political Science all have made me so much more aware and appreciative. Take any slice from this big world that we know—your own family, a traffic junction, a class room—and to understand it properly, we need to look at it from more than one angle, and see how all these disciplines interact with each other. Maybe the type of opportunities ahead of a multi-disciplinary course, both for higher studies as well as occupations need to be highlighted more, which may help students to opt for one with confidence.

***Q. Do you think studying or pursuing a specific degree is required for the Social Sector?***

I think the first and foremost requisite of contributing to the social sector is the spirit to think about more than just oneself. Without that, even if you have a specific degree, you may not be able to contribute. Having said that, I am not sure what 'specific degree' might be the best suited for Social sector. Is it Development? Is it Education? Or Public Policy? Development Economics or Econometrics? I find that to be a very difficult question to answer, and as a confused person, I'll come back to saying what I believe in—Multi-disciplinary Approach!

***Q. Any other comments on your experience here at Azim Premji University***

Azim Premji University has been a roller coaster, where I learnt to go through trying situations, understood what my priorities are, saw immense growth in myself and learnt the art of balancing academics and social life. I love how approachable almost all my professors are, always up for a chat over coffee, I respect how the University genuinely cares of mental well-being, academics and inter-personal relationships. When I look back, I actually feel like I have grown up. It was an experience that I can only hope that other people have as well.

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