

IIMA Through the Lens of a Newcomer

By a First-Year Student

The first thing everyone notices about IIM Ahmedabad is the red brick. It stands tall, timeless, and intimidating. Long before stepping onto campus, I had seen countless photographs of Louis Kahn Plaza, heard stories about sleepless nights, legendary professors, and case discussions that could change the way one thinks. Like many aspirants, I imagined IIMA as the pinnacle of management education—a place where only brilliance survived.

Then I arrived.

The bricks were real. The stories were real too. But what I discovered was something entirely different from what I had imagined.

To a newcomer, IIMA is less about academics alone and more about adaptation.

On the first day, I realised that nobody asks where you came from. Nobody cares about your CAT percentile after orientation. School ranks, college medals, corporate promotions, startup exits—everything that once defined your identity quietly dissolves. Every student here has an extraordinary story. Excellence is no longer a differentiator; it is the baseline.

That can be unsettling.

There is a strange silence that accompanies this realisation. You begin questioning yourself. Am I good enough? Can I keep up? Was my admission merely luck? These thoughts are surprisingly common, though rarely spoken aloud. The confidence that carried us through competitive exams suddenly gives way to humility.

And perhaps that is the first lesson IIMA teaches.

The classroom is unlike anything most newcomers have experienced. There are no passive lectures where students hurriedly copy notes. Instead, there are cases; messy, incomplete, and frustratingly realistic. The professor rarely tells you the "correct" answer. Instead, they ask questions. Then more questions. Every opinion is challenged. Every assumption demands evidence.

Initially, this feels uncomfortable.

One enters the classroom hoping not to be called upon. Gradually, one begins hoping to contribute something meaningful. The transformation is subtle but profound. You stop memorising concepts and start learning how to think.

Outside the classroom, another curriculum unfolds.

Hostel corridors become networking spaces. The dining hall transforms into a meeting room. A casual tea break turns into a debate on economics, cricket, geopolitics, entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence, or public policy. Conversations never truly end; they simply move from classrooms to cafés, from WhatsApp groups to late-night walks around the campus.

Learning, here, is continuous.

One of the most striking experiences for a newcomer is the diversity of people. Your neighbour might be a doctor who has treated patients in remote villages. Across the table sits an engineer who has built satellite systems. Another classmate has founded a startup, while someone else has served in the armed forces or worked in social development.

Each conversation becomes an education.

This diversity also teaches an important lesson in humility. Intelligence comes in many forms. Some people solve quantitative problems effortlessly. Others possess remarkable emotional intelligence. Some communicate with exceptional clarity, while others quietly observe before making one insightful comment that changes the entire discussion.

There is no single definition of excellence.

Time, meanwhile, behaves differently at IIMA.

Assignments arrive before the previous ones are complete. Group meetings stretch past midnight. Quizzes appear unexpectedly. Deadlines overlap. Sleep becomes negotiable.

Initially, this seems chaotic.

Eventually, one realises that the pressure is intentional. Management is not merely about solving problems when time permits; it is about making sound decisions when time is scarce. Prioritisation becomes more valuable than perfection. Finishing often becomes more important than polishing.

For a newcomer, perhaps the biggest surprise is discovering that failure is not unusual.

Many students who were toppers throughout school and college receive average grades for the first time. Some struggle to speak in class. Others perform poorly in quizzes despite studying hard. Rejections from clubs, committees, or competitions become part of everyday life.

Yet the campus has an unusual relationship with failure.

People discuss it openly. Seniors reassure juniors that one disappointing grade does not define a career. Friends help each other prepare before exams. Professors encourage curiosity even when answers are imperfect.

The emphasis gradually shifts from proving oneself to improving oneself.

IIMA also changes one's understanding of leadership.

Before coming here, leadership often seemed synonymous with authority: leading teams, giving directions, and making decisions. Here, leadership appears quieter. It is the student who patiently explains a difficult concept before an exam. The teammate who takes responsibility when a project falls behind. The senior who guides juniors without expecting recognition.

Leadership becomes service rather than status.

The campus itself contributes silently to this journey. Walking through Louis Kahn Plaza early in the morning, sitting under the trees after an exhausting day, watching peacocks wander across the pathways, or seeing lights remain on in academic buildings late into the night—these moments remind newcomers that they are part of an institution much larger than themselves.

Tradition and ambition coexist here.

As weeks pass, the newcomer begins to change.

Success is no longer measured solely by grades. It is measured by better questions, stronger friendships, improved judgment, and greater resilience. One learns to appreciate diverse perspectives, embrace uncertainty, and become comfortable with not always having the right answer.

The campus that once felt intimidating slowly begins to feel like home.

Looking through the lens of a newcomer, IIMA is not simply India's premier business school. It is a place where assumptions are challenged, identities are reshaped, and perspectives are broadened. It teaches finance, economics, marketing, and strategy—but more importantly, it teaches curiosity, humility, adaptability, and lifelong learning.

When I first entered IIMA, I thought I had arrived at the destination of years of hard work.

Now, I realise it was only the beginning.

The red bricks have not changed since the day I first saw them. What has changed is the person looking at them.
