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Kolkata, March 11 -- The number of students sitting for and MAT is increasing every year. Although the chances of gaining admission to the top institutes is declining as a result, students are devoting years of preparing for these exams, without realistic expectation of success. It's time they saw there are other options out there!

If you want to be judged holistically, if you are a smart individual but bad test-taker, or if you are simply hankering for global exposure, applying abroad is the best route forward.

Applying to top institutes overseas requires a combination of factors. The first of these is the exams - you may take GRE/GMAT, as most colleges accept these tests. These tests are less comprehensive in material covered than the CAT and are only one part of your whole application.

Students also need to prepare their professional CVs, speak to professors for recommendation letters, write individual essays for each college, and ready themselves for interviews. In the strongest applications, each of these components is well rounded.

Students may help themselves greatly by gaining experience in their respective field through internships and work experiences. Colleges often try to "look beyond the numbers," in applicants. Work experience, an understanding of one's own caliber, and plentiful involvement with social projects go toward strengthening the applicant's profile.

It is important to receive the right counselling in navigating these requirements. A good counsellor can help shortlist colleges according to 'fit', i.e. through their suitability for individuals instead of blindly following rankings.

Counselling can introduce you to programmes such as HBS 2+2 or YLP or even similar courses such as MIM, LBS etc. By working with an experienced mentor, you can maximize chances of admission by picking the right courses and the right schools. They can also help write essays, run through mock interviews with you and keep your focus on the final goal - admission at a good university. A mentor can also help you apply to correct scholarships and funding sources, as expenses are a major concern for all applicants.

There are many non-Indian options for higher education. If one does badly in CAT/GMAT/GRE, they can apply to Singapore/UK. Many colleges do not even require GMAT scores and only require undergraduate marks. However, you must be careful as both countries have several sub-standard institutions that are money-spinners, not educational enterprises. But colleges like Bath, CASS, LSE, LBS, NUS, SMU and NTU have tremendous value.

For CAT you must prepare all year and be judged on one exam. Since there is only one round a year, risks are high and students eventually have fewer choices. Applying to the US/UK's top MBA programmes allows for much more autonomy in the process. At the same time, you will be exposed to world-class resources, cutting-edge facilities, global networking opportunities and an international peer group.

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