



School Rules: The Cruels and the Cools

- Pahulpreet Singh

Besides running on the P.T. ground and walking to classes daily, a major portion of the routine of an average IITian involves crying about running on the P.T. ground and walking to classes daily. Whining is a birthright of every college student, but at IITH it's a culture, to the extent that we have an entire Facebook group dedicated to people complaining about their problems. Though let's keep Life@IITH-H aside for now.

Still, deep inside we all believe that college life has been the most unfair to us, but if we look around a bit more, it turns out that this might not actually be the case. Let's start with everyone's favourite - the attendance policy. Here I want to mention Savannah College of Art & Design, otherwise known

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as SCAD, where attendance is a part of your grade, and you are only allowed to miss 4 classes a quarter, with the 5th one resulting in you failing the course. Now, this might still seem okay according to our standards but wait, there's more. If you're over 15 minutes late, you lose attendance. Who's watching, you might ask? The Deans and Founders of the college who are constantly walking through the halls. On top of this, no excuses are entertained, may it be a doctor's note or a funeral photograph. There's more about Savannah, but I don't want to discuss it right now, or I might actually shed a tear or two.

Now since the assumption that we are the college with the cruellest policies is out of the way, we can move to school kids.



Now you may argue that schools have stricter policies than universities, but some of these will definitely blow your mind. And trust me, I'm trying my best to not sound like a BuzzFeed writer.

“The number of bathroom breaks per semester is limited to just three”

Anyways, continuing the theme of limited breaks per semester, let's come to Chicago's Evergreen High School. But this time, it's not about attendance, but bathroom breaks instead. The number of bathroom breaks per semester is limited to just three, and any more will result in the student having to stay at school after hours. Since I was a kid, two things have never failed to astound me - the outer space and the sheer stupidity of school administrators.

Next up, we have the dress code - now we are one of few lucky places in India with zero dress code restrictions, but it's not the same everywhere. For example, there is a school which didn't allow socks with logos in them, because obviously they would distract other people's learning environments. And one where a guy who wore a deep v-neck t-shirt got written up for cross dressing. The students of RMK Engineering College in Chennai

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were not allowed to wear jeans or t-shirts at all. Even for going to mess or library, they had to change into formals, and this rule was applicable even on holidays. The craziest part is, once a guest professor from IIT Madras who was supposed to give a lecture there was not allowed inside the college because he was wearing jeans.

In another episode of “What on earth just happened here?”, there is a school where students aren't allowed to sit on the ground because ‘people would have sex’. In my 18 years of life so far, I never thought that chairs are the thing that have been holding me back for so long. However, this does make me question if there is any use of beds other than skipping through night time and resetting your spawn point.

But no discussion about gender distancing in colleges is complete without mentioning some Indian colleges following such practices. Many colleges in Chennai and surrounding areas do not allow “romantic ringtones” on student's phones, in order to “curb romantic feelings”. You might have already heard of VIT, where guards ensure that there is no contact between a boy and a girl, other than three-seconds-or-less handshakes. There, if a guy and a girl are seen together holding hands, you can hear guards whistling (which I initially thought to be a gesture of teasing or even applause) followed by handing out red cards, which they call PDA slips, carrying a heavy “fine”. And during the college fests, they even maintain separate areas for boys and girls. But VIT isn't the only institute with a dedicated staff

to keep a check on these happy couples, there are many others. One example is Sathyabama University in Chennai where they used to have separate staircases for boys and girls. In buses, there were ropes behind the first few seats where the girls sat, and boys weren't allowed to cross the rope. Many colleges in Tamil Nadu used to have strict rules applying only to girls, like Sri Sairam Engineering college there are 22 special instructions for girl students, ranging from "No designer watch appearing big in size and in different colours" (sic) to "Should not bring sweets, cakes, chocolates and other snacks in bulk quantity to share with friends" and "Should not have account on Facebook, WhatsApp and other related types of this kind" (sic). Though the way they think of Facebook and Whatsapp as 'types of some kind' makes me doubt their credibility as an engineering college. And the surprise doesn't end here. At a few colleges, trees have been cut off to make sure boys and girls do not gather under them.

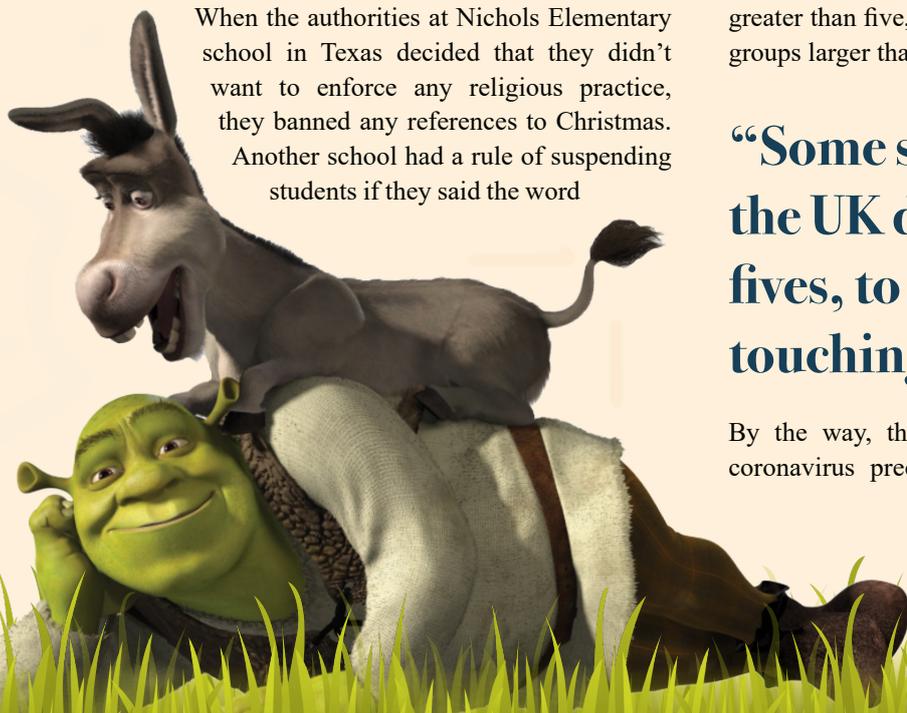
“A school had banned the word Shrek”

Even though they might appear to be from the 19th century, these incidents are actually from the 21st, which shows how interaction between the “two” genders is treated in India. Logic is not the only thing missing in the examples in the last paragraph, the existence of non-binary genders is also ignored. Luckily, the globe has two sides. To promote gender inclusivity, the public schools of Lincoln, Nebraska decided not to use the words “boys” and “girls” for students, and use terms like “purple penguins” instead. While a lot of parents complained that academic training is being sidelined, I am personally amused by the idea of a school where everyone's gender is just Aladeen.

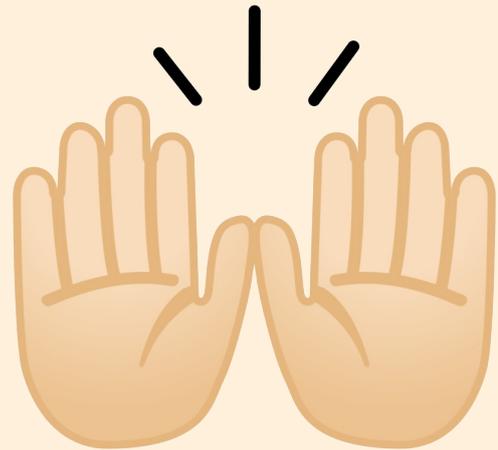
In the next amendment of “Freedom of [redacted]”, a school had banned the word “Shrek” after a teacher stumbled upon a beautiful “Shrek is Love, Shrek is Life” video.

When the authorities at Nichols Elementary school in Texas decided that they didn't want to enforce any religious practice, they banned any references to Christmas.

Another school had a rule of suspending students if they said the word



“Pokémon” though they wouldn't know if they were referred to as “Pocket Monsters”. And who would have thought a school would ban saying “Oh Snap!” because they assumed it carried a sexual meaning? But my absolute favourite in this category has to be that one middle school where no one was allowed to have or say the word “Dr Pepper” because the administration found out that it was the password to a shared Brazzers account. I don't know if the school realised that by banning it they're giving away the password to the entire school, but I'm sure a lot of students would have had fun that semester. (Also if anyone happens to know the username by any chance, do let me know. For research purposes.)



Next up, we have Samworth Church Academy, which was in the news a few years ago for banning students from raising their hands in class. This school in Mansfield argues that the traditional method of answering teachers' questions is outdated and fails to challenge them effectively. An official statement stated that students will only be allowed to raise their hands to establish silence for listening. Apparently this had been a common practice in the academy, and this probably explains why the school's own logo shows two children committing the heinous crime of raising their hands. Moving on, under yet another fan theory of “Is Umbridge real?!”, there is this school principal who decided that everything bad happened in groups greater than five, hence students were not allowed to gather in groups larger than five during recess.

“Some schools in the US and the UK do not allow high-fives, to prevent unwanted touching”

By the way, this isn't the only school which was taking coronavirus precautions waayyyy ahead of time. In some

schools across the US as well as a few in the UK, high-fives are not allowed, to prevent “unwanted touching” because according to the schools, this affects students’ academic experience. Clearly. And a middle school in Seattle had a rule where students weren’t allowed to come within an arms’ length of one another. A student here passing an eraser to a friend would definitely be a fun sight.



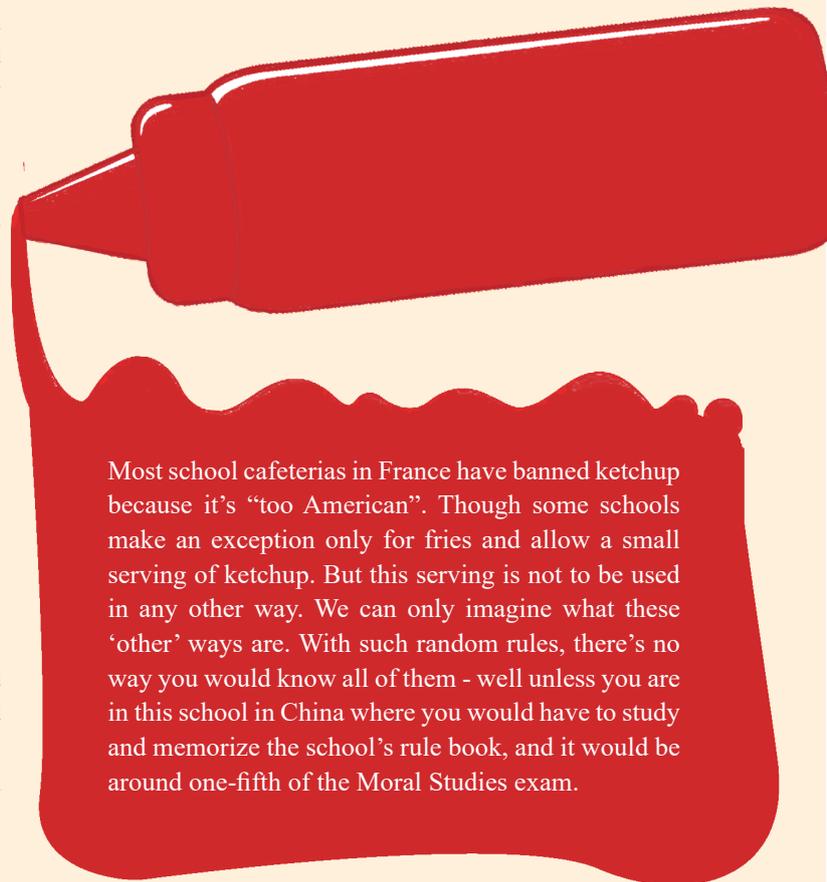
In the next verse of “This is America”, we have Bob Jones University - a religious university in South Carolina which bans jazz, rap, rock and country music, as well as religious music that borrows from these genres; but it’s okay to bring a pistol. Now don’t get all fired up, some schools do have anti-weapon laws. In one of such schools, a girl brought cupcakes that had little army men on them, which had to be removed because they carried little “guns”. Other objects usually not allowed include nail cutters, and objects which are not weapons but shaped like weapons. Though in my opinion, if someone can take over the school with a nail cutter or a Mjolnir-shaped keychain, they deserve to own the school.

“On the annual sports day, prefects started handing out detentions at the finishing line”

But one schools which completely owns every other in terms of random stupid rules is this private school in New Zealand which states in the driving section that students are not allowed to park their vehicles on top of school buildings. I guess the idea of students sitting in a crane and playing around with their cars is not a good one after all. In the same school, it was decided that on school prom, no alcohol would be allowed to be brought in from outside, yet there was an open bar inside the school on that day where you could get drinks for free. But my personal favourite has to be no running on the school grounds - including sports fields. To make the school board realise how dumb this was, on the annual sports day, prefects started handing out detentions at the finishing line. After the

whole school had been given detention, the rule was changed.

Next comes a school from Gondia, Maharashtra which had a rule that you can only leave the class with a partner whenever the students dispersed after classes, and the odd one left would have to wait until they find another odd one, and go out alone at the end if they don’t. This school also had a “statue bell” at the end of recess that marked the start of a 90 second period during which students were not allowed to move from their positions, and would often get scolded by the teachers if they did. Another school worth mentioning is Florida’s Pensacola Christian College where extra studying during exams is ‘strictly prohibited’. The rulebook also mentions that one may not wipe ‘boogers’ on the wall. Though I totally understand why booger-wiping is wrong, some rules like this one despite making sense make you wonder “What exactly happened that they had to make this rule?”. For example, elementary schools are forbidden to host poker tournaments in Fresno, California; it is against Florida’s state laws to transport livestock on a school bus; and Kentucky’s Asbury University handbook explicitly forbids “occult practices”.



Most school cafeterias in France have banned ketchup because it’s “too American”. Though some schools make an exception only for fries and allow a small serving of ketchup. But this serving is not to be used in any other way. We can only imagine what these ‘other’ ways are. With such random rules, there’s no way you would know all of them - well unless you are in this school in China where you would have to study and memorize the school’s rule book, and it would be around one-fifth of the Moral Studies exam.

If all this wasn’t enough, here is the icing on the cake. Schools in many parts of the world, including the UK don’t allow best friends. Yes. This was justified by saying that it was done to



protect the children’s feelings. The authorities believe that young kids can’t deal with so much drama, and that they get too upset after a “break-up” with their best friends. They also complain that best friends disrupt the open environment with their tight bonds and inside jokes. I don’t think I have to tell you how wrong this school of thought is, but you might ask how this is implemented. Let’s say a child is having a party, then under these anti-best-friend policies you can’t give out the invites in class unless you invite every single child. Though they had good intentions of not letting students feel left out, many critics have argued that this approach robs kids of the chance to form valuable coping skills.

“A school banned paper airplanes”

Speaking of feeling left out, we come to the cherry on top. A school banned paper airplanes, and the reason is not what you think. A kid started crying because all of his airplanes sucked and the rest of the students knew how to make good ones. And then they all had to suffer. Schools are indeed getting better at teaching life lessons, that you don’t have to be good at anything and can always get away by crying.

Now knowing IIIT-H is not the worst place on the planet, it still isn’t going to stop any one of us from complaining about our lives. If anyone in the academic office reads this, can we get fewer assignments please? ■

