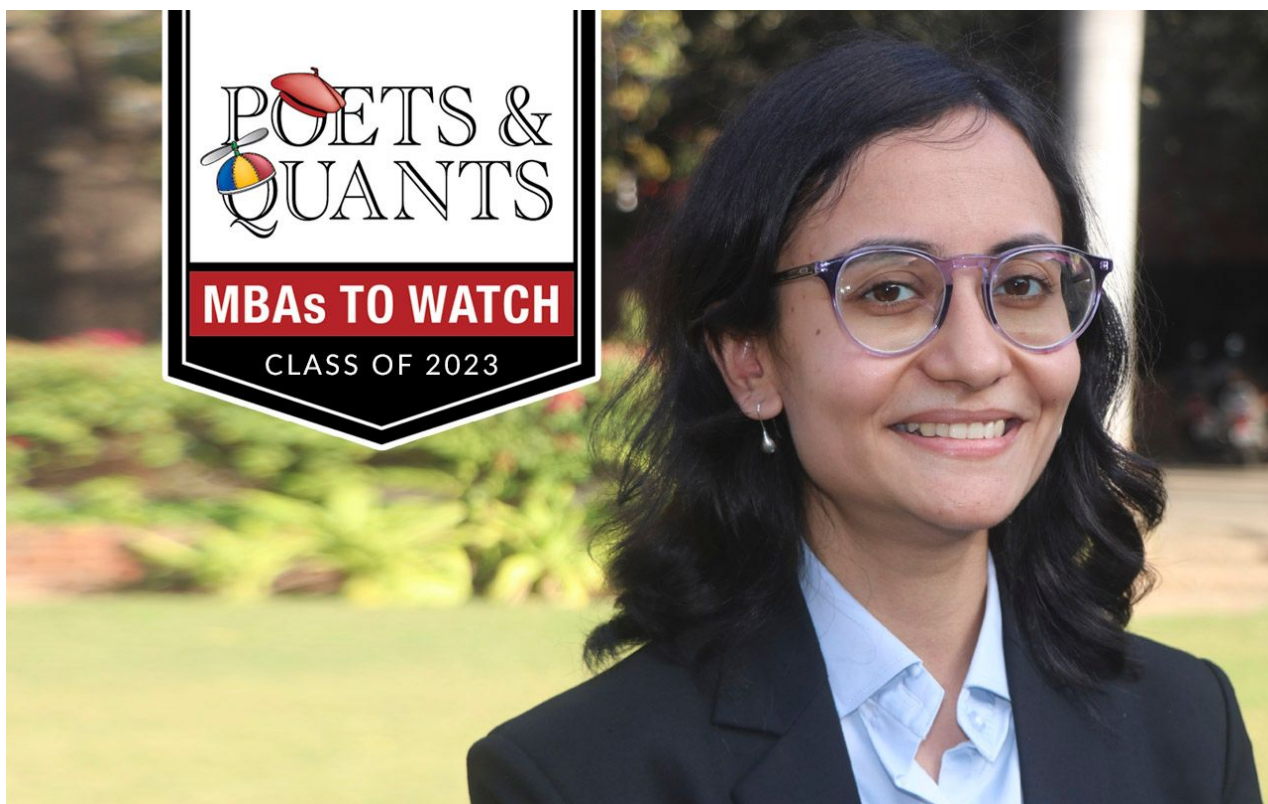


2023 MBA To Watch: Soumya Mohil, IIM Ahmedabad

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Jeff Schmitt

August 17, 2023



Soumya Mohil

Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad

“Introvert who is curious about people; experimenting my way through life.”

Hometown: New Delhi, India

Fun fact about yourself: My twin sister is also a part of the same cohort at IIMA!

Undergraduate School and Degree: Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Economics from Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi

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Where was the last place you worked before enrolling in business school? I worked at the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy (CSIP), Ashoka University as Manager – Strategy and Partnerships. I worked closely with the CSIP leadership in outlining the organization’s strategy, executing key projects, setting up internal systems and processes, and undertaking organizational development initiatives.

Where did you intern during the summer of 2022? NA

Where will you be working after graduation? I will be joining a leading Technology Consulting firm working with fortune 500 clients in the Human Resources function to drive strategic HR interventions and partner with the business vertical to execute all people-related initiatives.

Community Work and Leadership Roles in Business School: As an elected member of the Alumni Committee, along with my team, I worked to enhance alumni relations with the institute as well as the incumbent batch. We built on the work done by the previous batches and worked closely with Program Chairperson in cementing these initiatives. We redesigned some of the existing programs to improve the quality of engagement and introduced a few new ones to increase the frequency of interactions.

Which academic or extracurricular achievement are you most proud of during business school? While the practical application of most of the courses we go through at IIMA would start after we join our respective jobs, the learnings of one course that I felt I could apply almost immediately was 'Negotiation Strategies for Managers'. Not only did I imbibe the concepts of empathy and assertiveness, but I also got a chance to practice them in cases and live role plays. I ended up doing pretty well in a course I thought I wasn't made for. Later during the various alumni committee activities, I was able to use my learnings and negotiate better with various stakeholders such as vendors, institute office bearers, alumni, and batchmates. I also realized that the learnings from the course percolated down into my daily dealings with people and helped me gain confidence. I am proud of the transformation I saw in myself.

What achievement are you most proud of in your professional career? I was working with a non-profit in the state of Madhya Pradesh back in 2015 to set up a livelihoods initiative for the women of a self-help group. Given my limited knowledge of the field, I ran into many hurdles. I soon realized that things on the field work very differently and I needed to go out and meet people to understand what is needed and feasible in this context and geography. I was soon accompanying staff members to field visits daily, visiting other fellows at their location to understand their experience. I also contacted and visited local vendors, government stakeholders, and experts in the field. Eventually, these small steps ensured we were able to plan a sustainable livelihood activity. As an IIMA faculty said in a class recently, "Our ambitions are a function of our exposure". What I consider my achievement from that year is the exposure I was able to give to the community.

Why did you choose this business school? Coming from a non-traditional background with experience across different functions, I was clear I wanted to go to a school with a focus on General Management. What made IIMA truly stand out for me, apart from the obvious reasons of stellar faculty, strong alumni base, interesting courses, and commitment to diversity, is its 100% case-based pedagogy. This pedagogy prepares one to step into strategy and general management roles in any function and is exactly what I needed to start the next phase of my career.

What was your favorite course as an MBA? I enjoyed the People Analytics elective, offered by Professor Aditya Moses. This was a mix of strategy and HR focus areas, looking at analytical strategies firms employ for personnel management and how it can become a source of competitive advantage. We looked at cases ranging from bank to start-up, to non-profit, technology firm, focusing on areas such as surveys, culture, performance management, hiring methods, and incentives. The cases focused not just on how technology and data can be leveraged, but also on pitfalls of technology, including privacy concerns and ethical use,. Prof. Moses made the classes extremely interactive. Each class was so relatable, inviting perspectives from almost every member of the class. Moses made us question what seemed obvious, encouraging us to think of the implications of any decision beyond the immediate impact.

What was your favorite MBA event or tradition at your business school? My favorite tradition at IIMA is the multitude of cultural and sports events that filled our calendars throughout the year, despite a hectic schedule. These included all festivals being celebrated together with students and families, cultural nights where cohort members showcased their talent, cohort dinners with faculty, faculty-student sports matches, and inter-section cultural competition called T-nite, which saw fierce competition among the sections. Such events fostered unity in the cohort, allowed us the opportunity to interact with faculty outside of classrooms, and create connections across programs. The feeling of community, camaraderie, and cohesion after such events is unparalleled.

Looking back over your MBA experience, what is the one thing you'd do differently and why? While IIMA has a lot to offer for anyone studying here, to excel at anything, IIMA demands time, effort, enthusiasm, and most importantly putting one's self out of one's comfort zone and taking risks. Sometimes with peers and sometimes with oneself. I saw value in pushing myself and attempting things out of my comfort zone. If given a chance, I'd change that, and who knows I may discover more about myself in the process than I did in the last year.

What is the biggest myth about your school? Given the legacy of the school and the rigor of the program, I had thought the place would be harsh and ruthless. I soon came to realize how everything on campus is designed to make our lives easier. This is especially true when the faculty is rooting for us to succeed and are willing to help out whenever needed.

What did you love most about your business school's town? Ahmedabad has a lively eating-out culture; people here are really passionate about food. The city is dotted with cafes and independent eateries. I enjoyed going to some of these places with classmates, whenever we got a chance. Sabarmati Riverfront is another beloved spot in Ahmedabad. After a hectic week, sitting at the banks of Sabarmati River is truly a calming experience.

What surprised you the most about business school? While there's no denying that business schools are extremely competitive, I found that people who gained the most out of their MBA were the ones who chose collaboration over competition. It is possible to

thrive in school while taking others along. I am indebted to my batchmates who helped me in small and big ways: whether spending hours explaining tricky concepts, generously sharing notes with the class, offering extensive feedback on resume, pitching in to help with solving cases and mock interviews or simply lending an ear during tough times.

What is one thing you did during the application process that gave you an edge at the school you chose? I feel what gave me an edge during the IIMA application was focusing on something I felt IIMA values: real-world experience and integrity. I gave in-depth instances from my work experience for every point, which helped establish credibility with the admissions committee as well as the interview panel. I was able to bring aspects from different roles I took up in my career across different functions such as strategy, operations, and funding, which added more color to my application. IIMA values earnestness in efforts and authenticity of the individual, and not merely flashy statements of achievements. Bringing alive my work experience through specific stories in an authentic manner gave me an edge.

Which MBA classmate do you most admire? The cohort has an eclectic mix of people who are all amazing in their own ways. Whether it was academics, sports, arts, public speaking, organizing skills, or work ethics, I found there was so much to learn from and admirable about everyone around me.

However, if I was to pick only one classmate whom I admire, it would definitely be Vibhor Kansal. Vibhor is a close friend and someone I often turn to when in a pickle. His clarity of thought and ability to cut through complex concepts amazes me. He is as good at ideating as he is at executing, something which makes him an asset to any team he is a member. I have seen him deftly apply or create frameworks to make sense of the ambiguous- not just to academics, cases, or projects, but also to analyze softer aspects of life. I feel what makes him stand out are his exceptionally high EQ, understanding of people, and constant striving to add value to others. On a lighter note, he is also the class clown and is often found wisecracking in and outside the classroom.

What are the top two items on your professional bucket list?

* It is often difficult to quantify the impact human resources as a function has on business. I would consider it an achievement for myself if I'm able to show an impact on business and get human resources a seat on the strategy table.

* After having a crested impact in my chosen function, I would want to move into a strategy role and try to follow what my favorite professor at IIMA suggested: movement should not just be vertically upward but spirally upwards, exposing one to different parts of the business. I would like to take up roles in other functions to gain a more holistic perspective.

What made Soumya such an invaluable addition to the Class of 2023?

“Having worked in the impact sector, Soumya brought with her a sui generis perspective to the class. Her experience provides an understanding of how businesses can contribute to society and create social value. This holistic understanding of society made her a well-rounded individual, who would be a great asset to corporate India. I must also mention that her contribution did not end with the classroom alone; as a member of the Alumni Committee, she contributed by helping the cohort expand its professional network by proactively engaging with the alumni. She and her team have set the bar very high for alumni engagement for the subsequent batches. From a young researcher with experience in social science to a confident young woman ready to take on challenges that the corporate world has to throw at her, I have seen the transformation in her. I have no doubt she is on a path to an amazing career.”

Prof. Viswanath Pingali

Chairperson, MBA – PGPX, IIM Ahmedabad

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