Exploring Linkages in India

India is a country with an economy that is producing ever larger numbers of families who are both dedicated to the value of education and are eager to send their children to major universities. It’s a country, much of whose population is fluent in English. It’s a country quick to embrace new technologies and to create new knowledge in ways that were once considered a possibility only in the West.

Few would disagree that U.S. universities, if they wish to retain their intellectual credibility and status, must engage the potent intellectual and entrepreneurial forces rising from the South Asian subcontinent. The challenge is finding the right fit. IU has much to contribute and much to gain by alliances with academic institutions in India, but if our needs and strengths do not fit with the needs and strengths of our Indian partners, then the major efforts needed to forge an alliance will not produce results in proportion.

With these thoughts in mind, Patrick O’Meara and Shawn Reynolds spent 10 days last July in India. One of the best ways to begin such a search is with alumni. IU has been an important destination of students from India for several generations. At a reception and a dinner in Mumbai, O’Meara and Reynolds discovered how enthusiastic and activist a group they are. Alumni had organized a reception for students about to leave to study at IU for the first time. IU business faculty, Munirpallam Venkataramanan and Vijay Khatri, were on hand to talk about IU and take questions from parents, students, and alums. The conversations were vigorous and lengthy, the questions about campus matters and procedural issues unending. The students (and their parents) went away with more confidence and less fear of the unknown. Alums left feeling that they have given something back to their alma mater, which many of them remember with fierce loyalty.

Professor Venkat called the event a “great success. It allowed a personal touch to anxious parents (perhaps students also) where they saw administrators and faculty freely mingle with them and answer questions. A good photo tour of campus and city with color commentary from Patrick helped them appreciate the cultural diversity and beauty of the campus most of them have never visited. It also reinforced the friendly and inclusive culture of IU.”

Alumni, such as Gaurav Parikh, were helpful in setting up the connections for the meetings with various institutions of higher learning in India. O’Meara and Reynolds met with seven university and research establishments and found several promising connections. At the University of Mumbai on the western coast of central India in the city formerly known as Bombay, they found the potential for joint efforts in business management training and for joint faculty and graduate student research projects. At the Tata Institute of the Social Sciences, also in Mumbai, they found cross-disciplinary programs in geography, environment, and sustainable growth that could link with similarly oriented centers at IU.

The University of Pune (not far from Mumbai) has developed programs that actively engage its students with local communities, organizations, and villages. There may be ways to link service learning programs at IU to these and provide opportunities for IU students to work in these local projects. Outside of Pune is a technical park with impressive supercomputing resources dedicated to research and high-speed analysis. There could be possible links with IU’s own supercomputing resources.

Another university interested in partnerships via supercomputing linkages is the University of Delhi in the north. The campus is one of the most wired in India with close to 8,000 nodes, and administrators there were interested in Internet2 and TransPAC and their potential for collaborative research. In New Delhi, the Jawaharlal Nehru University is seeking ways to link their expertise in Indian social issues to international efforts in the same areas,

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including ethnicity, civil society, and urban neighborhoods.

Potential linkages extend beyond colleges and universities. The IU contingent met also with the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi and with the Indian Ministry of Personnel to discuss training programs. The Indian Ministry sends mid-career civil servants for short-term training to U.S. universities. Linkages with IU’s Indian Studies and with Public and Environmental Affairs might be possible.

This initial exploration uncovered a number of “key points of excellence in India’s higher educational system,” O’Meara explains. IU’s part in the important transformations occurring in India may be to link point to point, to find those focused opportunities where colleagues of similar experience and training can work to their mutual benefit and progress. “We should be particularly attentive,” O’Meara continues, “to those scholars and administrators who make the greatest effort not just to establish an exchange, but to establish the right exchange—the exchange that best utilizes the resources available and that is capable of producing something that both universities want and need.”

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Gaurav Parikh
http://alumni.indiana.edu/profiles/alumni/gparikh.shtml

University of Mumbai
http://www.mu.ac.in/

Tata Institute of the Social Sciences
http://www.tiss.edu/

University of Pune
http://www.unipune.ernet.in

University of Delhi
http://www.du.ac.in/

Jawaharlal Nehru University
http://www.jnu.ac.in/