



SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND APPLIED SCIENCE

CURRENT NEWS

Princeton joins U.S.-India teaching collaboration

In an effort to promote international cooperation and innovation in engineering education, Princeton University has signed an agreement with India's Amrita University to encourage Princeton faculty to teach satellite-transmitted courses in India.

Princeton joined 19 other U.S. universities in signing a memorandum of understanding intended to bring faculty members to India to teach courses, primarily in areas of science and technology. The courses will be broadcast by a government-operated satellite to thousands of students at 50 campuses throughout India.

"This agreement presents an opportunity for our faculty to contribute to the education of many talented Indian students who would not otherwise have the opportunity to be taught by leading scholars in key areas of science and technology," said Maria Klawe, dean of Princeton's School of Engineering and Applied Science. "It will also be a valuable resource for our research and education initiatives on technology for developing regions."

Microsoft Corp., Qualcomm Corp. and Cadence Design Systems, Inc. have agreed to fund U.S. participation in the initiative by paying salaries and travel expenses for the U.S. professors. Amrita University will host the visiting teachers and provide teaching and technical support.

Sharad Malik, professor of electrical engineering, represented Princeton at the official launch of the initiative in December. Along with representatives of other U.S. universities, Malik met with the president of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, and officials of Amrita University. Klawe also met with university and government officials during a visit to India in January.

The other participating universities are Carnegie Mellon, Cornell, Georgia Institute of Technology, Harvard, Purdue, State University of New York at Buffalo, University of California-Berkeley, University of California-Los Angeles, University of California-San Diego, University of California-Santa Cruz, University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign, University of Maryland, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, University of Michigan, University of North Dakota, University of Texas-Austin, University of Washington, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Yale.

All lectures will originate at Amrita University's e-learning studio and will be broadcast via the Indian Space Research Organization's EDUSAT satellite, which is dedicated to distance learning initiatives.



Sharad Malik

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In a recent memo to participating institutions, Krishnashree Achuthan, program director for the U.S.-India initiative, said that the educational offerings would focus on graduate-level courses in engineering and computer science, information and communication technologies, material science and nano-technology, biotechnology and bio-informatics, and medical sciences. Faculty are encouraged to teach three-credit courses (36 hours of instruction) or two-credit courses (24 hours of instruction).

Amrita's 400-acre campus is located on the hillside of the western mountain ranges of India, about 20 kilometers from the city of Coimbatore. Amrita will provide each visiting faculty member an office as well as technical and secretarial support and free accommodations in its guest house. Each Indian affiliate university that receives a course will appoint a local teaching assistant for the course. The local assistants will work with the faculty instructor on all academic matters pertaining to the course and will handle the grading of assignments and exams and other logistics.

Malik said that participating faculty members would have to teach over the summer or during sabbaticals, because they would need to be in India for an extended period to teach an entire course. He said that he is intrigued by the idea of retooling a given course designed for a class of 15 Princeton graduate students so that it can be used to reach 100 times as many students. "It would be very rewarding for me as a professor to see 1,500 students benefit from my efforts while teaching a single course," he said.

At the same time, the collaboration will serve as a test-bed and allow U.S. faculty members an opportunity to work out issues associated with electronic learning and learn from each other and the experience, Malik said. "Even though it is still early, I believe the collaboration will gain momentum," he said.

3617

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