

12/07/05 -- UND JOINS OTHER TOP AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES IN CREATING PARTNERSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT OF INDIA'S DEPARTMENT OF SPACE, INDIA'S DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, AMRITA UNIVERSITY; ALL NOW PARTNERS IN INDO-US INTER-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

The University of North Dakota today [Wednesday, Dec. 7] joined 15 other universities — including Harvard, Princeton and the University of California in Los Angeles -- in signing an agreement with AMRITA University in India, the Government of India's Department of Space, and the Government of India's Department of Science and Technology that makes UND and the other schools partners in the Indo-US Inter-University Collaborative Initiative in Higher Education and Research. Six other American schools had already have signed on to the consortium.

Dr. Greg Weisenstein, UND Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Dr. Santhosh Seelan, UND associate professor of space studies, attended the signing ceremony in New Delhi, India. Weisenstein signed the agreement for UND. Seelan, who previously was employed by India's Department of Space and was in charge of a satellite data gathering and analyzing organization, was instrumental in connecting UND to the initiative.

Among the attendees at the signing were Indian President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and Bill Gates, chairman and chief software architect of the Microsoft Corporation. Representatives from each of the organizations involved signed the Memorandum of Understanding.

"This is terrific for our faculty and students, especially those in our Space Studies program, who will have significant opportunities for exchange programs," said UND President Charles Kupchella. He said Indian students and faculty will also have the opportunity to study and work at UND. "We already have a strong relationship and partnership with NASA, one that has grown out of the excellent work done in the John D. Odegard School of Aerospace Sciences, and particularly in Space Studies. This agreement now establishes a relationship between UND and another national space program, one focused on the kinds of work we do here with satellite imagery."

"Two of the key partners to the MOU are India's Department of Space and its joint Center for Digital Earth at AMRITA University. Consequently, we envisage space related education to be a major component of the Initiative. University of North Dakota's leadership in various fields, particularly Aerospace Education, is well known and we are excited to have them as a partner in the consortium," said Dr. P. Venkat Rangan, Vice Chancellor of Amrita University.

UND's Space Studies department is uniquely qualified to participate, because already 125-150 students a year participate in UND's master's degree in Space Studies, taught through distance education to students literally around the world.

Kupchella said the exchange program matches UND's Strategic Plan, which calls for more collaborations and exchange programs, especially those which will enhance the diversity of the campus. UND already has students, faculty and spouses from 64 countries. In fact, more international students already come from India than from any other country except Canada. This agreement will strengthen the UND-India connection, said Kupchella.

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