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SPECIAL FEATURES: COIMBATORE

Education hub

K. ANANTHAN



Professor G.Thiruvassagam, Vice-Chancellor of Bharathiar University, with a batch of Chinese students.

A SYMBIOTIC relationship exists between the several engineering and textile industries and the academic institutions in Coimbatore district. There are three universities in the district: Bharathiar University, the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University (TNAU) and Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham (AVV), run by the Mata Amritanandamayi Math. There are 29 engineering colleges and several polytechnics as well.

Bharathiar University has 85 affiliated arts and science colleges, and a host of other affiliated educational institutions. About 39,000 graduate, 17,000 postgraduate and 5,000 M.Phil students pass out of its departments and affiliated colleges every year.

A group of 20 students troop into Vice-Chancellor G. Thiruvassagam's office and turn the atmosphere vibrant with their gregarious conversation. They are from Hubei province in China and are students of English Literature. Why did they choose to come to this university? The students say they surfed the Net and found the course offered by Bharathiar University in communication skills, conversational English and English Literature ideal.

"Five hundred students from China want to join the university to study English Literature. We are revamping all the existing courses. We are changing the curriculum to suit the needs of the time," Thiruvassagam said.

Application-oriented components relating to computers, communication skills and team spirit have been introduced in

graduate courses. The university is giving "paramount importance" to research in biotechnology and nanotechnology. It plans to open a Centre for Life Sciences in March and a Rs.100-crore Nano Facility Centre.

MULTI-CAMPUS UNIVERSITY

"Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham offers courses in both engineering and medicine. Today, treatment processes are heavily influenced by technology. It is inter-disciplinary. New ideas emerge when different people come together," says P. Venkat Rangan, Vice-Chancellor of the deemed-to-be university. Mata Amritanandamayi is the Chancellor. A result of such "cross-pollination" has been the development of an insulin-pump for diabetic patients. "Biologists from the Amritapuri campus in Kerala and engineers from the campus in Coimbatore fabricated the insulin-pump," he said.

"We will launch it commercially in seven to eight months," Abhayamrita Chaithanya, chief operating officer of the AVV, said. What began in 1994 as an engineering college with just three departments and 120 students in a village called Ettimadai, 16 km from Coimbatore, has today grown into a deemed-to-be a university.

It has five campuses in three States: Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu, Bangalore and Mysore in Karnataka, and Kochi and Kollam in Kerala. The Coimbatore campus has Schools of Engineering, Business and Communication. "Our focus now is on doing good-quality research and producing good quality Ph.Ds."

The "Tamil Nadu Agricultural University is number one among the 44 State agriculture universities in the country because it continues to lay stress on education, research and extension," said Prof. C. Ramasamy, Vice-Chancellor, the TNAU.

The university has strengthened its B.Tech courses in Biotechnology, Bioinformatics, Horticulture, Energy and Environment and Food Processing. The TNAU has excelled in extension programmes. Krishi Vigyan Kendras, sustained earlier by non-governmental or private organisations, have now been brought under the technical control of the university.

Under the Tamil Nadu Precision Farming Project, it demonstrates high-technology agricultural projects in the districts.

T.S. Subramanian
