Sensitize students to society’s problems

There are several aspects to a university becoming world class. The most important aspect is to focus the faculty, students, and the research and learning that occurs as a result of the interaction between the two. The university facilitates interaction between teachers and students resulting in research and higher learning with active involvement and support of the industry, community and the government. Thus, the quality of faculty and students that a university has is crucial in making it excel.

Conduct socially relevant research and make students socially conscious

It is the quality faculty and students that ensure quality research, which is an extremely important component for a university to be classified as world class. Today education and research go hand in hand, as textbooks become obsolete even before they are printed. Excellence in research comes from establishing practices like a strong performance incentive in the form of grants from both industry and government for the faculty. These incentives however, must be tied up with accountability. The societal relevance of the research and students that a university produces is being recognized as more important criteria than the kind of jobs that the students land. Universities around the world are recognizing that they need to be committed to carrying out research, projects and higher learning that benefits society. Billions of dollars may be poured into research, but if that research is not helping society prosper, then it really not worth it.

Give autonomy and support to visionary founders

Universities in India are relatively young compared to universities in the West. So, in a way we are still trying to figure out our path. Universities require visionary founders and management who must have autonomy to chart out the course for the university. This is how many top universities in the US were founded. If you look at corporations in India, this is how they have found a place in the international arena. Just 35 years ago, there were no Indian companies big enough to figure in the International rankings even in the field of Information Technology. But today many IT companies in the world are from India, thanks to their visionary founders, resources and freedom to compete in the market. Similarly, if some of the Indian universities with visionary founders get the right opportunity, they have the potential to emerge as the best in the world.

Increase appetite for risk

Indian institutions must increase their appetite for risk in order reach an international stature. This risk-taking pertains to different levels. It means encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives, putting in place some sort of tenure system with performance linked promotion and tying up faculty compensation to grants. These are some of the standard practices that US universities employ to ensure they have dedicated faculty. At a different level, I would like to quote our Chancellor Kenter “Learning and research should be important for life and not only for earning a living. It is very important to give wholesome, holistic, well-rounded training to students so that when they graduate, they have the right perspective which brings them a lot of fulfillment in life.”

Social vision

Sensitization of students towards societal problems and the community around them is important. They have to realize that money is not the only factor that makes a difference in life. Getting involved in the problems of society and looking at ways to improve the situation of the grassroots and solve real life situations is important. It is these students who will develop affordable healthcare for people who cannot pay high medical costs and address problems of environment, energy and water. The thought process that needs to go into such innovation comes only from interaction of the university with society. Hence it is one of those issues that should be given top priority.