

Panjab University, Chandigarh and University of Houston plan a duel degree program

Alumni Leaders from North America from Chemical Engineering Department gathered in Houston May 16 to 19 to help transform Panjab University and its Chemical Engineering Department towards a higher ranking premium institution in India, with a slogan of "March to the Top". The conference was a result of the vision and hard work of Dr. Arun Verma (and his team) who has been working tirelessly for past seven years to assist in this transformation; in addition to maintaining discussion between Panjab University and University of Houston to collaborate in joint research & degree programs between their respective Chemical Engineering Departments.

The conference kicked off on the morning of Friday May 16th with an introductory meeting at UH Campus where Chairman Dr. Triantafyllou Moutzaris and faculty members met the PU team visiting from India. Both teams presented their undergraduate and graduate programs, areas of research and also highlighted potential areas of cooperation. The teams agreed to encourage age direct faculty to faculty interaction and joint research between them. This meeting was followed by a Campus tour for the visiting team including all the undergraduate and graduate labs of U of H.

Following this, a separate tour was given to the PU team by the Houston Alumni Leaders of the U of H Campus Shop which assists with branding, marketing and selling branded merchandise in the physical shop and its on-line shops to students. Alumni and general public. PU Registrar agreed to implement a similar set up back in Chandigarh as soon as possible with a target date of no later than December 2025.

The Alumni Leader's Conference component of the proceedings kicked off on the evening of 16th May at the Hyatt, Houston West. An



The visiting Panjab University team presented a memento Dr. Renu Khator.

and renowned entrepreneurs Dr. Durga Agrawal and Dr. M.S.Kaish of Houston shared how they helped their respective Alma Mater, Dr. Durga Agrawal focused on his experience of helping Delhi College of Engineering, now known as Delhi Technological University (DTU) bring in international flavor to its programs through a partnership with U of H. He emphasized the need for persistence in the face of cultural and bureaucratic challenges when striving for partnerships. Dr. M.S.Kaish, an Alum of Panjab Engineering College, Chandigarh talked about his initial journey of breaking through cultural barriers in US. His innovative technological solutions to oil industry's problems helped him achieve success in US. He has been engaged in Alumni engagement and transformation at U of H.

Select Alumni shared their connection to DCET, learnings and how they could help Gurmeet Chahal, CEO of Digitrite highlighted how the four pillars of the acronym DCET helped him navigate

higher education and professional world. He believes that DCET stands for

- D - Diversity of thought
- C - Collaboration, communication and coaching
- E - Edge and engineering acumen

Puneet Saman, President and Managing Partner at Link Growth Capital partners highlighted in his presentation the Past, Engineering the Future prospect is needed to help DCET get back to its past glory. He highlighted specific strategies and paths to a) improve physical infrastructure, b) Increase student rigor, c) Focus on Faculty interest and d) bring in Alumni Engagement. All four of these components are needed to get things going in the right direction.

Sunil Sibbal, Managing Director of Investment Research at Seaport Global highlighted his learnings from Mandali commission protests of 1990, career at Engineers India Limited (EIL) and global technical

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Alumni Leaders mingling at the reception on May 16th

evening reception for more than 50 Alumni Leaders and representatives from both universities welcomed the evening's special guest Dr. Renu Khator, the Chancellor of University of Houston System and president of its flagship University of Houston campus, over the last seventeen years. Post dinner Dr. Khator shared her journey in transforming U of H from a struggling school system to a top engineering school in the US Research Universities. She talked about four essential components of her strategy for this transformation: A bold Vision, Buy in from the community, Relentless change and Longevity for the new culture to take roots.

These were highlighted by Dr. Khator as key ingredients to change the culture of any organization. She talked about several instances from her tenure at UoH where these essential ingredients helped raise funds for the University and start new programs at the University that helped it break into the top tiers of US Higher education. She has been also invited by the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi to study how her experiences can help India students in the Q&A session members of the PU community sought out her ideas on challenging the bureaucratic mindset, breaking through administrative barriers and implementing new ideas to help improve standards of education and student experiences. The evening concluded with a Vote of Thanks from the hosts and presentation of a memento from India to Dr. Khator.

The elevating events and ideas of the 16th set for which an engaging 17th for which the theme was "Learning from the Leaders and Networking". The day was kicked off by opening remarks from Dr. Arun Verma and Ravi Gosil. Dr. Arun Verma introduced various sessions during the day - highlighting how they tied into the main theme of the day. The

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3+1 and 3+2) for joint and dual degree were discussed. A Blank MOU form to facilitate an agreement was given to the PU team by U of H. The PU team agreed to review and make adjustments to their academic program to dovetail with UoH's. The aim soon as possible to facilitate students joining from PU to UoH under this program for the fall 2026 session. The meeting concluded with a tour of U of H's state of the art Recreation and Fitness facilities.

Dr. Y.P. Verma, Registrar of PU highlighted the achievements and how this played a leading role in India's development journey. He also highlighted multitude of current initiatives underway on the Campus to improve education experiences and outcomes, bring in Research grant and also refurbish the engineering programs offered by the University.

Dr. Anupama Sharma, current Chairperson of DCET highlighted the main constituents of the programs offered at Panjab University Chemical Engineering, & administrative challenges faced in transforming the department. She highlighted recent positive steps through hiring of Professors of Practice straight from the faculty, Research grants from international institutions and placement and employment trends of graduating students from the program.

On Sunday, May 18, the group got back together for Brainstorming sessions. Alok Jaina led the discussion, summarizing the key takeaways from Dr. Khator's talk as well as a call for action for the PU Community if it really believed in and wanted to make progress towards the goal of "March to the Top". Pros and cons of the current policies like the 3-year rotational nature of the Championship were discussed along with potential strategies of expedited learning. Teacher ratios and quality of the classroom experience; PU team is working on an action plan for the path forward to create a better path for the future.

In the evening Dr. Arun Verma held a reception at his residence in honor of the visiting PU Team and also to bid farewell to Mr. Alok Jaina who is moving to Virginia from Houston, Texas. The well-attended reception also highlighted the cultural diversity of the attending members.

The conference concluded on May 19th morning with a meeting at the UoH. The meeting was attended by the PU visiting team, Alumni and several members of U of H (Chem, Engg Faculty and senior Administrative staff including Dr. Satish Khator, the Associate Dean for graduate and international programs and computing facilities in the College of Engineering.

Both teams discussed & sought clarifications as to what needs to be done by PU to have a dual degree program with U of H. Several options (2+2;



Right, Dr. Arun Verma hosted a reception to the visiting delegation, alumni members and community leaders at his residence.



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